

PHILOSOPHICAL (PRE)OCCUPATIONS AND THE PROBLEM OF IDEALISM:
From Ideology to Marx's Critique of Mental Labor

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Abstract of Dissertation

PHILOSOPHICAL (PRE)OCCUPATIONS AND THE PROBLEM OF IDEALISM: From Ideology to Marx's Critique of Mental Labor

My dissertation shows that the ideology concept developed by Karl Marx was first and foremost a critique of mental labor in bourgeois society, rather than a philosophy of consciousness, as is commonly assumed. Marx's theory of ideology constituted a pivotal moment in the formation of his critique of political economy insofar as it offered a solution to the problem of idealist metaphysics, discussed among the Left Hegelian philosophers in the late 1830's and early 1840's, by explaining it in terms of its origin in the class structure of capitalist society. I interpret Marx's texts using the approach of the "Cambridge School" of the history of political thought (Quentin Skinner), which has stressed the importance of examining classical texts in terms of their authors' explicit objectives, the polemical function of philosophical language as individual speech acts, and the contextual nature of particular ideas and concepts.

Based on a close study and analysis of one of Marx's so-called "works of the break," my investigation focuses on establishing the original meaning of "ideology" in relation to the Young Hegelian case for the "end of philosophy." While it is generally recognized that *The German Ideology*, written in 1845/46 by Marx and Engels, is a key text in nineteenth century intellectual history, few attempts have been made to subject this complicated manuscript to a comprehensive analysis. Consequently, the connection between ideology and the capitalist division of labor has not been duly recognized. Most

broadly, then, the goal of this dissertation is to reconstruct Marx's effort to fully secularize post-Enlightenment critical philosophy by applying the tools of political economy to the question that animated the intellectual debate at the time: the question of how to come to terms with, and overcome, Hegel's metaphysical idealism.

The significance of my dissertation lies in its contribution to nineteenth-century intellectual history, to the study of critical social theory, and to contemporary discussions of the Marxist tradition. Because exegetical projects have typically converged on just the first hundred pages, one quarter of the complete manuscripts, this section, titled "I. Feuerbach," has gained misleading prominence in readings of *The German Ideology*. "I. Feuerbach" resembles a discourse on method because of its general comments on "the correct manner of approach," but its importance within the work as a whole is questionable due to its fragmented and unfinished state. In order to shift our understanding of *The German Ideology* toward a better appreciation of Marx's concrete analysis of the typical (because characteristically bourgeois) yet peculiar (because uniquely passive) expressions of the German intelligentsia, I privilege instead the longest part of the manuscript, "III. Saint Max," Marx and Engels's exhaustive settling of accounts with Max Stirner's 1844 book *The Ego and Its Own*. This book was then the most radical attempt to break with the Left Hegelian critique of religion and prompted Marx to subject his own Feuerbachian assumptions to thorough scrutiny. Revealing Stirner's "Ego" – the singular, separate, fully sovereign individual – to be no alternative to Feuerbach's "Man" but rather another humanist abstraction from the real relations that define people in their particular social situations, Marx took the decisive step to produce a materialist, i.e. economic, account of ideology.

By focusing my inquiry on Marx's response to Stirner, which remained unpublished until 1932, I reread *The German Ideology* in terms of its specific arguments against the Young Hegelian idealist distortion of particular historical events, social transformations, and contradictions. However, by situating the work squarely within the context of the early nineteenth-century debates over how to successfully "world" Hegel's dialectic, I also recover Marx's particular intervention in these debates. Marx, I show, was able to overcome the idealism of his former friends and allies by grounding the critique of philosophy in a theory of the intricate connection between labor, class, and practice.

The most important conclusion of my work is that when Marx spoke of ideology he meant the idealist predilections built, as it were, into intellectual labor in a class society. Unlike many recent commentators who have maintained either that Marx, in his discussion of ideology, set out to produce a systematic exposition of the so-called "base-superstructure" doctrine or that Marx anticipated his theory of commodity fetishism in *The German Ideology*, I draw attention to something that has rarely been examined: the link between the ideology concept and the concept of the division between exclusively mental and exclusively manual labor in capitalism. I thereby challenge the notion that Marx's theory of ideology was essentially a theory of systemic distortion, that is, a theory of materially conditioned, false ideas that obscure, in the minds of the oppressed, the truth of their oppression. This interpretation, I maintain, has misconstrued Marx's role in post-Hegelian critical theory by projecting a concern proper to twentieth-century Western Marxism, onto Marx.

In an attempt, then, at a historical hermeneutic, this dissertation demonstrates that *The German Ideology* must be read in the context of the secularization efforts in nineteenth-century German philosophy, specifically the Young Hegelian critique of philosophical idealism. Drawing on three disciplines – philosophy, intellectual history, and social/political theory – my dissertation establishes Marx’s intervention in post-Hegelian political philosophy as a continuation and eclipse of the struggle for what Ludwig Feuerbach called a materialist “philosophy of the future” that stretched back to the French Enlightenment and its critique of metaphysics. The contemporary theoretical relevance of my work lies in what I call the Marxian “class theory of consciousness.” By focusing on Marx and Engels’s understanding of the ramifications following from the division between manual and mental labor, this dissertation establishes that *The German Ideology* offers insightful ways of thinking about the historical and current intersections between modes of thinking and economic processes.

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INTRODUCTION

Ideology in General, *The German Ideology* in Particular

Throughout the twentieth century, “ideology” has epitomized the promise held out by “the idea of a critical theory,” to use a phrase coined by Raymond Geuss.¹ While playing different roles at different times and in different situations, “ideology” has been a key concept in virtually every academic discipline in the humanities and social sciences. In fact, it has become so integral to the theoretical repertoire of cultural theory that its meaning is often assumed to be self-evident. Therefore, many writers who employ the term “ideology” do so with little or no awareness of its history.² At the same time, there has been a vociferous and continuous debate, among those who *are* interested in theorizing ideology before its historical trajectory, over what it is, what it does, and what it explains. Indeed, there are few other terms in the human sciences that can be said to rival “ideology” in having achieved a similar degree of contentiousness. The “career” of this concept³ has been so marked by struggles over central principles that one can reasonably conclude, in the words of one commentator, that “of all essentially contested and controversial concepts in the social sciences and the humanities, that of ‘ideology’ may well come out near the top of the list.”⁴ While, especially among non-Marxists, there is a general consensus that ideology is the answer to the question “What do Adolf Hitler,

¹ Raymond, Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

² One example is Louis Dumont’s book *German Ideology: From France to Germany and Back* (1994). Exploiting the general amnesia with respect to the specifically Marxian meaning of this title, Dumont uses the word “ideology” simply to mean “culture” or, more specifically, a “system of ideas and values” (17).

³ Terrell Carver, “Ideology: The Career of a Concept,” in Terence Ball and Richard Dagger (eds.) *Ideals and Ideologies: A Reader*, 5th ed (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2004), 3-10.

⁴ Teun van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 1.

Bill Gates, and the Spice Girls have in common,”⁵ there is also a substantial body of literature that contains several sophisticated accounts of the major developments in the theory of ideology.⁶

Charting the course of “ideology’s” complicated legacies is not a simple undertaking, but it has been done, not once but many times. Marxist scholars and intellectuals, in particular, can now rely on a number of succinct and yet thorough histories of the term.⁷ There are also innumerable short, and very short, introductions to the subject, most of which follow a predictable story-line. Typically, it is stressed by the authors that the ideology concept has gone through multiple transformations and shifts and that it has been incorporated into diverse, sometimes contradictory, politico-theoretical agendas. Floating, like a piece of driftwood, on the changing intellectual currents, “ideology” has variously fallen in and out of favor, rejected out of hand by Foucault, for instance, and fundamentally rethought by Lacan’s acolytes, to name just two trends. In other words, the twists and turns of this history have been rehearsed and rehearsed well. Due to the fact the history of “ideology” has typically been construed as an aspect of the intellectual history of the past century or two, many studies have not

⁵ James Decker, *Ideology*, Transitions (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3.

⁶ Aside from the words already mentioned, there are, for instance, Raymond Boudon’s 1986 work *The Analysis of Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and David McLellan’s *Ideology* (Minneapolis, MN; London: Open University Press, 1995), written in 1986. Two lesser-known contributions are the edited volume by Piotr Buckowski and Andrzej Klawiter, *Theories of Ideology and Ideology of Theories* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986) and the collection of essays edited by Anthony Parel, *Ideology, Philosophy and Politics* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1983). Some works that focus more specifically on the Marxist concept of ideology are *The Concept of Ideology and Political Analysis: A Critical Examination of Its Usage by Marx, Lenin, and Mannheim* by Walter Calsnaes (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), Bhikhu Parekh’s *Marx’s Theory of Ideology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), and Martin Seliger’s *The Marxist Conception of Ideology: A Critical Essay* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁷ Two classic overviews of the history of ideology theory are George Lichtheim’s 1967 essay “The Concept of Ideology” (in *The Concept of Ideology, and Other Essays* [New York: Random House, 1967]) and Ulrich Dierse’s 1982 entry under “Ideologie” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck [eds.], Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1982). An excellent recent account are offered in the three consecutive entries under “Ideologie,” “Ideologiekritik,” and “Ideologietheorie” in *Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus* 6 (Hamburg: Argument, 2004).

gone beyond a summary of the main protagonists and their contributions. More often than not, these general introductions have tended to rehash the same critical moments and issues. It is thus useful to present a new perspective, one that does not aspire to being comprehensive and is therefore able to explore particular problems in greater depth. Such a non-totalizing but “thick” approach to ideology theory is the kind of perspective I wish to offer in this dissertation.

Ideology: The Study of an Idea

With respect to the early history of ideology theory, few significant revisions have been made since Hans Barth’s 1945 seminal work *Truth and Ideology*.⁸ The well-trodden path generally begins with an investigation of the ostensible reversal in meaning that is said to have taken place shortly after the invention of the term in 1796 by French Enlightenment thinker, revolutionary politician, anti-metaphysician, and sensualist philosopher Destutt de Tracy.⁹ Napoleon Bonaparte, who turned against his former allies in the *Institut Nationale* after becoming First Consul and attacked Tracy’s *idéologie* – a positive term meant to describe the “science of ideas” – is usually credited with having given “ideology” its negative connotation. Sometimes, as in Barth’s case, the roots of the concept are sought further back in history: with Bacon, Locke, Condillac (Tracy’s idol),

⁸ Hans Barth, *Truth and Ideology*, trans. by Frederic Lilge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

⁹ The literature on Tracy’s life and work is limited. There are a number of studies on the *idéologues* in French, but in English only very few books have been written, one of which is Emmett Kennedy’s biography titled *A Philosopher in the Age of Revolution: Destutt de Tracy and the Origins of "Ideology"* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1978). More useful for an understanding of Tracy’s philosophy are Brian Head’s *Ideology and Social Science: Destutt de Tracy and French Liberalism* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985) and his *Politics and Philosophy in the Thought of Destutt de Tracy* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987). Tracy’s most well-known work is probably his *Elémens d'idéologie* (Paris: Courcier, 1801-1818).

and French materialists Helvétius and Holbach.¹⁰ Marx, of course, is next in line, and finally, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are discussed as points of contrast with both the Enlightenment and the Marxian line of thought.¹¹ More current histories further include examinations of the twentieth-century Marxists, including Lukács, Althusser, and Roland Barthes; the continuation of the “irrationalist” tradition with Sorel and Pareto; the sociology of knowledge with its main representative Mannheim; the Frankfurt School with Adorno and Habermas, as well as contemporary anthropological and literary approaches such as that of Clifford Geertz and John Frow.¹²

There is a paradox at the heart of the literature on ideology theory. This paradox consists in the fact that despite routine assertions about the radical incommensurability of various theories, historians and critics have never stopped asking the question: What, then, is ideology? On the one hand, it is patently obvious that “ideology” does not have one meaning but multiple meanings because it has no stable, generally agreed-upon referent. It is clear that “ideology” is always linked to the specific concerns of a specific thinker at a specific historical, political, and intellectual moment. On the other hand, there is a consensus that we can rely on a canon of representative works in charting the history of “ideology.” While this might seem like a commonsensical premise, it has the

¹⁰ All of the philosophers named here were related to the *idéologues* by way of their critique of metaphysics and fixed ideas. The suggestion, however, that Bacon’s theory of “idols” is etymologically linked to Tracy’s coinage of the word “ideology” (literally: the study of ideas) is merely conjecture.

¹¹ Schopenhauer and Nietzsche tend to serve a strategic function in these accounts. Since neither used the term “ideology,” their work is considered mostly for the purpose of demonstrating the origins of the contemporary meaning of “ideology,” which has achieved dominance with postmodern and post-postmodern theory. While the original meaning of the word is sometimes described as “epistemological,” the second major theoretical trajectory in the field of ideology theory has been characterized as resting on an “ontological” definition of ideology. Both of these are, naturally, philosophical. However, this distinction between epistemological and ontological, while not perfectly accurate, offers a meaningful interpretation of the historical shift, likely reinforced by late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century historicism, from notions of ideology that were designed to address problems of truth, knowledge, and method, to notions of ideology related more closely to the fundamental question of being human, i.e. the question of language, representation, and cultural practice.

¹² See, for instance, Eagleton’s collection of excerpts titled *Ideology* (London: Longman, 1994).

unfortunate effect of making vastly divergent theoretical approaches appear directly related – simply because they happen to use the same term – and then evoking “internal” contradictions in an otherwise coherent field of inquiry where in reality there is no such field at all. Hence, most scholars are unanimous in their insistence that there has never been *a* (singular) concept of ideology and that even if one were to posit such a concept, its inherent heterogeneity would be its most marked characteristic. At the same time, however, the various histories of *the* concept of ideology are, of course, held together by the tacit assumption that there is indeed some unitary object that is the subject under investigation. This view is made more explicit by the not-so-tacit assumption that regardless of how different the individual interpretations of the problem of ideology are, they all revolve around certain key problems and that these key problems can be used as yardsticks for categorizing particular thinkers’ contributions to the field. The paradox, it would seem, then, can only be solved by way of a departure from the *Begriffsgeschichte* model and by way of a firm rejection of the idea that the different concepts of ideology are only different interpretations of the same idea or thing. Instead, it is critical to recognize the absolute specificity of each of those concepts and the insurmountable hiatus between, say, Marx and Engels’s notion of ideology on the one hand and the anthropological, sociological, and linguistic models that prevail today on the other hand. This does not mean that comparison is useless. On the contrary, a true grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of a particular ideology concept can only be achieved through rigorous comparative historical analysis.

Another central feature of the literature on “ideology” is that the history of the concept is often described as having broken into two opposing camps. These camps are

sometimes called “broad” versus “narrow,” “inclusive” versus “exclusive,” or “expansive” versus “restrictive”; other times, they are referred to as “positive” versus “pejorative,” “cultural” versus “critical,” “descriptive” versus “prescriptive,” and “neutral” versus “evaluative.” In many ways, these terms are stand-ins for the distinction between Marxist and non-Marxist approaches. Crucial points of disagreement typically emphasized are questions over the relation between ideology and reality, the genesis of ideology, and the function of ideology. The way in which each theory of ideology is seen to respond to these questions determines how it is situated along the spectrum separating the “general” and the “specific” concept of ideology. Again, a more complicated picture emerges once we take a closer look at the developments and disjunctures within each of the two camps. Not only do the different tags attached to one side fail to coincide completely with each other, they also occasionally overlap with, and cut into, the tags affixed to the other side. It is, therefore, difficult to assign particular conceptions unequivocally to either one or the other. The restrictive meaning of the term “ideology” intended by its coiner, Destutt de Tracy, for example, is not pejorative at all. However, Althusser’s theory of the ideological state apparatuses (ISA’s) is both cultural and critical because Althusser thinks of ideology as absolutely necessary and inescapable in all social systems *and* as absolutely distinct from science.

Similarly, there is a considerable ambiguity with regard to the question of the “outside” of ideology in other theorists’ work. Lukács, to take a case in point, defined ideology both a class consciousness in general, arguing that all consciousness is essentially class consciousness, and as reified consciousness in particular. One final and highly illustrative example of a thinker who advanced the position that there is and there

is not an outside of ideology is Karl Mannheim. He put forth the concept of *Weltanschauung*, which was to become a key idea for the sociology of knowledge. In Mannheim's view, this concept is a logical (and historical) extension of what he calls the "total" concept of ideology (the unmasking of the opponents' standpoint on an ontological and noological level, rather than merely on a psychological level, as is the case with the "particular" concept of ideology). As a result of self-reflection, the analyst holding this "non-evaluative general total" concept of ideology can recognize her own "*Standortsgebundenheit*." Refraining from judgment about the truth of the ideas analyzed,

This approach confines itself to discovering the relations between certain mental structures and the life-situations in which they exist. We must constantly ask ourselves how it comes about that a given type of social situation gives rise to a given interpretation. Thus the ideological element in human thought, viewed at this level, is always bound up with the existing life-situation of the thinker. According to this view human thought arises, and operates, not in a social vacuum but in a definite social milieu.¹³

But Mannheim also formulates, in the same work, a theory of ideology that differentiates ideology from utopia and other (non-transcendent) ideas:

In a word, all those ideas which do not fit into the current order are "situationally transcendent" or unreal. Ideas which correspond to the concretely existing and *de facto* order are designated as "adequate" and situationally congruous. These are relatively rare and only a state of mind that has been sociologically fully clarified operates with situationally congruous ideas and motives. Contrasted with situationally congruous and adequate ideas are the two main categories of ideas which transcend the situation—ideologies and utopias. . . . Ideologies are the situationally transcendent ideas which never succeed *de facto* in the realization of their projected contents. . . . Utopias too transcend the social situation, for they too orient conduct towards elements which the situation, in so far as it is realized at the time does not contain. But they are not ideologies, i.e. they are not ideologies in the measure and in so far as they succeed through counteractivity in transforming the existing historical reality into one more in accord with their own conceptions.¹⁴

¹³ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985 [1936]), 80.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 194-6.

For Mannheim, then, “ideology” is both all knowing and being and, at the same time, only certain forms of knowing and being – unsuccessfully realized forms, that is. It is difficult to ignore the tension between these two notions.

True insight into what happened to “ideology” can be gained when we resist the temptation to force widely disparate thinkers, texts, or even passages of texts and elements of a thinker’s ideas into formal typologies. Specifically, a more properly historical approach to ideology theory must begin with an account of the emergence of the very distinction between “specific” and “general” notions of ideology. The first observation to be made in this vein is that it was Max Horkheimer who, as early as 1951, pointed out that the ideology concept had “lost its theoretical quality.”¹⁵ Horkheimer’s argument was so perceptive precisely because it problematized with great clarity the turn that historical materialism had taken in the direction of a new philosophy of consciousness. Especially with the increasing bureaucratization of the Soviet Union; World War II; and first the consolidation of, and eventual triumph over, Marxism had begun to attend more to cultural and ideational questions while questions of economic and practical concern retreated into the background. The deflation of the hope that the Russian Revolution marked the beginning of a world revolution was accompanied, among other things, by a heightened interest in modes of thinking as such – true and

¹⁵ The fact that the concept of ideology had lost much of its original specificity by mid-century was noted by Max Horkheimer in an essay titled “Ideologie und Handeln” (originally titled “Ideologie und Wertgebung”). In this essay, Horkheimer states: “Only rarely is the word ‘ideology’ thought of as a precise concept today. . . . One could say that it has lost its theoretical quality. For behind the general notion only a vague memory of the theoretical structures, which had lent the term meaning, reverberates in the now empty term. Often, ideology refers to nothing but any kind of conceptual connections, a theory, a particular notion, or thought as such” (in Kurt Lenk [ed.], *Ideologie: Ideologiekritik und Wissenssoziologie* [Neuwied, Germany: Luchterhand, 1967], 304; all translations from the original are my own.) Terry Eagleton, for his part, makes the same observation 40 years later: “Such charity [expanding ‘ideology’ to vanishing point] is a fault because it risks broadening the concept of ideology to the point where it becomes politically toothless” (Eagleton, *An Introduction*, 7). And further, “[i]f there is nothing which is not ideological, then the term cancels all the way through and drops out of sight” (ibid. 9).

false, proletarian and bourgeois, theoretical and spontaneous, conservative and revolutionary – which in turn brought with it an inflation of the ideology concept. A serious engagement with Marx’s critique of idealist philosophy was thus preempted.

The dilution of the ideology concept noted by Horkheimer has continued ever since. It has been most clearly discernible in the fact that the concept has come to play a crucial role, in disciplines like political science, sociology, and anthropology, where ideology has become affirmed as any kind of symbolic identity that functions as social cement. Alvin Gouldner, for instance, has theorized ideology as a modern form of discourse that joins and mobilizes people not by invoking traditional authority but by constructing rational arguments about the world.¹⁶ Gouldner explains,

Ideologies may organize social action and social solidarities in ways irrelevant to, or cutting across, the traditional structures of society – family, neighborhood, or church. Ideologies can bind men who may have little in common except a shared idea. Ideologies thus premise the possibility of powerful affinities, of claims and obligations among persons bound only by common belief. In some part, it is possible for them to do so because of the deterioration of traditional social structures in the transition from old regime society to modern bourgeois societies.¹⁷

Gouldner’s idea of ideology as a cause and effect of what he calls “detraditionalization” was anticipated by Clifford Geertz, who, in his well-known essay “Ideology as a Cultural System”¹⁸ compared ideology to a “roadmap” in unfamiliar territory and explained that

[t]he function of ideology is to make an autonomous politics possible by providing the authoritative concepts that render it meaningful, the suasive images by means of which it can be sensibly grasped. It is, in fact, precisely at the point at which a political system begins to free itself from the immediate governance of received tradition, from the direct and detailed guidance of religious or philosophical canons on the one hand and from the unreflective precepts of

¹⁶ Alvin Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology: The Origins, Grammar, and Future of Ideology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

conventional moralism on the other, that formal ideologies tend first to emerge and take hold.¹⁹

This is clearly a far cry from Marx's claim that ideology is quasi-religious, irrelevant, and unproductive. Most recently described by Slavoj Žižek as "ideology's" "self-dispersal,"²⁰ the expansion and dissipation of the ideology concept, however, is not the outcome of an auto-destructive program; rather, it is an aspect of the particular transformations of, and critical debates over, Marxian doctrine after Marx's death in 1883 and Engels's death in 1895. In order to clearly see the contrast between the critique of ideology *qua* idealist philosophy and the theory of ideology *qua* all thinking/believing/feeling, we must review some pivotal moments in the process under discussion.

As is well-known, Vladimir I. Lenin was one of the most vigorous critics of the revisionism of the Second International. Against his opponent Eduard Bernstein, he argued that capitalism would only be overcome by a violent revolution led by a vanguardist party, rather than by gradual reform based on trade unionism. However, like Bernstein, Lenin advocated viewing Marxism as an ideology – a notion obviously at odds with Marx's understanding of the term. Already, the first generation Marxists, such as Georgi Plekhanov and Franz Mehring, had broadened the definition of ideology to ideals in a general sense; Bernstein simply took the step to designate socialist thought as ideological. However, it was Lenin's acute awareness of the political importance of radical theory in the class struggle that made his positive affirmation of Marxist "ideology" so appealing to the second and third generation Marxists. Lenin's position was that different classes produce different forms of consciousness and that, when these

¹⁹ Ibid., 218-9.

²⁰ In the introduction to *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), Žižek claims that "this notion somehow grows 'too strong,' it begins to embrace everything, inclusive of the very neutral, extra-ideological ground supposed to provide the standard by means of which one can measure ideological distortion" (16).

forms of consciousness become systematized, they become ideology. Thus he spoke of a proletarian ideology in contradistinction to bourgeois ideology. In *What Is to Be Done?*, Lenin expounds the difference between the spontaneous class consciousness of the proletariat on the one hand and the scientific ideology of historical materialism on the other as he argues against Kautsky's mechanistic theories of social transformation and populist ideas of revolutionary agency. He states,

[S]ubservience to the spontaneity of the labour movement, the belittling of the rôle of "the conscious element," of the rôle of Social-Democracy, *means, whether one likes it or not, growth of influence of bourgeois ideology among the workers.* All those who talk about "exaggerating the importance of ideology," about exaggerating the rôle of the conscious elements, etc., imagine that the pure and simple labour movement can work out an independent ideology for itself, if only the workers "take their fate out of the hands of the leaders." But in this they are profoundly mistaken. . . .

Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers in the process of their movement, then *the only choice is:* Either bourgeois, or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for humanity has not created a "third" ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or above class ideology). Hence, to belittle Socialist ideology *in any way to deviate from it in the slightest degree* means strengthening bourgeois ideology.²¹

The thinker generally acknowledged to have initiated the current called Western Marxism, [György Lukács](#), who was critical of the Soviet Union but committed to Lenin's historic intervention, picked up on the notion of ideology as class consciousness. For Lukács, "ideology" encapsulated the idea that social groups that have particular conditions of existence in common produce particular forms of thought. For him, as for Lenin, this did not imply a relapse into epistemological relativism. Harking back to the Hegelian idea of totality, and framed by an effort to avoid a certain scientism that had come to pervade interpretations of Marx, Lukács's distinction between true and false consciousness posits that some ideologies, by virtue of their situation in the social order,

²¹ Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* (New York: International Publishers, 1929), 39-41.

can grasp history as a whole. Proletarian consciousness, from this perspective, is paradigmatic of knowledge that is at once specific and universal; it alone is able to transcend immediate experience. This is because, in contrast with reified bourgeois consciousness, it is reflexive and rests on an understanding of its own role and that of the other actors in the process of historical transformation. Thus, he states:

The unique function of consciousness in the class struggle of the proletariat has consistently been overlooked by the vulgar Marxists who have substituted a petty “Realpolitik” for the great battle of principle which reaches back to the ultimate problems of the objective economic process. . . . When the vulgar Marxists detach themselves from this central point of view, i.e. from the point where a proletarian class consciousness arises, *they thereby place themselves on the level of consciousness of the bourgeoisie*. . . .

As the bourgeoisie has the intellectual, organisational and every other advantage, the superiority of the proletariat must lie exclusively in its ability to see society from the centre, as a coherent whole. This means that it is able to act in such a way as to change reality; in the class consciousness of the proletariat theory and practice coincide and so it can consciously throw the weight of its actions onto the scales of history – and this is the deciding factor. When the vulgar Marxists destroy this unity they cut the nerve that binds proletarian theory to proletarian action. They reduce theory to the ‘scientific’ treatment of the symptoms of social change and as for practice they are themselves reduced to being buffeted about aimlessly and uncontrollably by the various elements of the process they had hoped to master. [. . .]

In other words, when the final economic crisis of capitalism develops, *the fate of the revolution (and with it the fate of mankind) will depend on the ideological maturity of the proletariat, i.e. on its class consciousness*.²²

A similarly anti-mechanistic notion of ideology was developed by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci is best known for his concept of hegemony, intended to describe the means by which a social group gains consent for its dominance from those it governs. Ideology, according to Gramsci, is the part of hegemony that deals with ideas; it is the symbolic aspect of the struggle for power. Gramsci wants to insist on the power of signification, language, and culture. Like Lukács, he too uses the word “ideology” in a

²² Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (New York: International Publishers, 1929), 68-70; italics in original.

neutral sense. That is, he applies the term to all different kinds of consciousness, including those that secure the hegemony of the “historical bloc” that rules at any one particular moment and those that seek to disrupt the *status quo* and to rise to a position of dominance. Further, he argues that ideology is not necessarily reactionary but can be truly radical, productive, and constitutive. The following quote from Gramsci’s notes on “The concept of ‘ideology’” illustrates this view.

One must therefore distinguish between historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or “willed.” To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is “psychological”; they “organise” human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc. To the extent that they are arbitrary they only create individual “movements,” polemics and so on. . . .

Another proposition of Marx is that a popular conviction often has the same energy as a material force or something of the kind, which is extremely significant. The analysis of these propositions tends, I think, to reinforce the conception of *historical bloc* in which precisely material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces.²³

Even though much of Louis Althusser’s work can be understood as a critical response to the fusion of Marxism and historicism²⁴, and therefore of Lukács’s Hegelianism, Althusser actually contributed to the extension of the organicist cast that “ideology” had assumed. The idea that ideology reproduces the social order, specifically the relations of production, by creating and shaping subjectivity, is essentially about coherence (rather than conflict) and stability (rather than change). But while his psychoanalytical notion of interpellation fits very well with his structuralist Marxism, Althusser’s approach to ideology is even more expansive than Gramsci’s because of its

²³ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 376-7.

²⁴ See Louis Althusser, “Marxism is not a Historicism,” in Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1970), 119-44.

adamant inclusion of the objective, bodily, or experiential nature of ideology *qua* subjection. Even prior to writing his well-known essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser expresses this clearly. In “Marxism and Humanism,” for example, he says,

So in every society we can posit, in forms which are sometimes very paradoxical, the existence of an economic activity as the base, a political organization and “ideological” forms (religion, ethics, philosophy, etc.). *So ideology is as such an organic part of every social totality.* It is as if human societies could not survive without these *specific formations*, these systems of representations (at various levels), their ideologies. Human societies secrete ideology as the every element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life. . . .

So ideology is not an aberration or a contingent excrescence of History: it is a structure essential to the historical life of societies. Further, only the existence and the recognition of its necessity enable us to act on ideology and transform ideology into an instrument of deliberate action on history. . . .

Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with “consciousness”: they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as *structures* that they impose upon the vast majority of men, not via their “consciousness.” They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and the act functionally on men via a process that escapes them. Men “live” their ideologies . . . *not at all as a form of consciousness, but as an object of their “world”* – as their “world” itself. . . .

So ideology is a matter of the *lived* relation between men and their world . . . In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but *the way* they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence. . . .²⁵

Significantly, the so-called post-Marxist approaches to ideology have been just as sweeping in terms of their theoretical reach. Ernesto Laclau, for example, has elaborated the critique of the conception of the ‘zero level’ of ideology, claiming that the unmasking of the notion that there is an outside of ideology as the ideological gesture *par excellence* is the only viable form of ideology critique left. His strategy is to replace the positive concept of discourse with the negative concept of the “constitutive distortion” in order to argue that symbolic closure (or the idea of the ultimate coincidence between the “fullness

²⁵ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, 232-3.

of the community” and certain historically contingent interpretations of it), while necessary for the creation of the social link, conceals its own impossibility, and that this exposure of the permanent impossibility of the metaphysical operation should be the task of contemporary *Ideologiekritik*. Thus, he says,

What is not, however, usually perceived is that this critique of the ‘critique of ideology’ can advance in two different directions which lead to contradictory results. The first leads to what we could call a new positivism and objectivism. If we entirely do away with the notion of ‘distortion’ and assert that there are only incommensurable ‘discourses,’ we merely transfer the notion of a full positivity from an extra-discursive ground to the plurality of the discursive fields. This transference retains entirely the idea of a full positivity. In the same way that we have a naturalistic positivism we can have a semiotic or a phenomenological one. If, on the other hand, what we are asserting is that the very notion of an extra-discursive viewpoint is the ideological illusion *par excellence*, the notion of ‘distortion’ is not abandoned but is instead made the cornerstone of the dismantling of any metalinguistic operation. What is new in the latter is that what now constitutes a distorted representation is the very notion of an extra-discursive closure.²⁶

Laclau’s identification of the very idea of truth with ideology is a logical consequence of the rejection of representationalism by postmodern theory, that is, of the assumption that mental constructions “correspond” to reality more or less accurately. Because of the equation between the ideological and what is sometimes referred to as the dream of an Archimedean point or the “God-trick of seeing everything from nowhere,”²⁷ attempts to resuscitate a critical concept of ideology have often been balancing acts over the dangerous waters of “false consciousness.” Since this term has been associated with an unacceptable kind of Marxism – a positivistic and arrogant, if not totalitarian kind – theorists have carefully tried to steer around the question of truth in redefining ideology in terms of the structural and functional role of systems of ideas with respect to the *status*

²⁶ Ernesto Laclau, “The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology,” (*Modern Language Notes* 112, 3 [April 1997, German Issue]), 299.

²⁷ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of a Partial Perspective,” in *ibid.*, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature* (London Free Association Books, 1991). 189.

quo. This redefinition has been tremendously productive; the endorsement of a political, rather than epistemological, interpretation of “false consciousness,” for instance, has encouraged the refinement of the Mannheimian 1929 distinction between conservative or ideological ideas and radical or utopian ideas.²⁸ Revolutionary ideas, for instance, are no longer conceived in terms of objective truth but rather in terms of collective identity, ethics, or the will to power.

Of course, the circumvention of the ideology-science binary has helped to displace, rather than solve, the question of consciousness and its social determinations. It has also led to the outright dismissal of potentially fruitful projects, such as that of the early Roland Barthes, to theorize the systemic link between ideology and the relations of production. In his collection of essays, “Mythologies,” Barthes identified as ideological those signifying practices that legitimize – i.e., universalize, dehistoricize, and naturalize – the given social order by systematically distorting language. While Barthes’s argument that working class language is free of distortion and therefore an *a priori* site for a radical politics has its precedents, his semiological approach was in fact original. Unfortunately, it was severely discredited by the accusation that Barthes succumbed to the genetic fallacy, which supposedly posits that particular groups of people come with ready-made worldviews that are inherently backward looking or forward looking.²⁹ If the approach

²⁸ Mannheim argued that while ideological ideas lag behind the times and are nostalgic and out-of-step with the movement of history, utopian ideas transgress the present social order and anticipate the future. Ideology, from this perspective, is false only in the sense that it is inadequate to the demands of the age. Thus, in the chapter on “The Utopian Mentality” in *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim claims that ideologies are essentially failed utopias: “Ideologies are situationally transcendent ideas which never succeed *de facto* in the realization of their projected contents” (194) and explains *apropos* utopia that “every age allows to arise (in differently located social groups) those ideas and values in which are contained in condensed form the unrealized and unfulfilled tendencies which represent the needs of each age. These intellectual elements then become the explosive material for bursting the limits of the existing order. The existing order gives birth to utopias which in turn break the bond of the existing order, leaving it free to develop in the direction of the next order of existence” (199).

²⁹ This is the reason why Barthes’ chapter on “Myth Today” in *Mythologies* (New York, Hill and Wang, 1972) is sometimes published without the last part, in which Barthes claims in the much decried

had instead been pursued further, it might have actually allowed Marxist theory to invert once more the rationalist and psychologist assumption that the masses, unless enlightened, stumble around in a fog of myths and lies, mystified as to their real situation, and must be woken up and called to their revolutionary mission.

Even so, Barthes was no exception to the new fixation on the role of ideas in the historical present, which, as I have maintained, is a sign of a fundamentally different situation from that which produced the theoretical impulse that provoked Marx and Engels to critique the German ideology in 1845/46. At the same time, Marx was clearly one of the more discerning minds of his time, able to predict the growing polarization of society under capitalism and able to view history as a product entirely of class relations. At a time when working class movements were only just gaining momentum (with the Chartists in England), Marx was able to see the systemic disconnect between philosophy and the praxis of the proletariat. Certainly, it can be argued that, given the situation, Marx may have overemphasized the immediately practical aspects of negation in an effort to correct the idealist misconceptions of the Young Hegelians. However, before we draw this conclusion, we will have to study Marx's ideas closely. His work in 1845/46, and in later years also, differed from that of Lenin, and then especially that of the second

“woodcutter” passage:

If myth is depoliticized speech, there is at least one type of speech which is the opposite of myth: that which *remains* political. Here we must go back to the distinction between language-object and metalanguage. If I am a woodcutter and I am led to name the tree which I am felling, whatever the form of my sentence, I ‘speak the tree’, I do not speak about it. This means that my language is operational, transitively linked to its object; between the tree and myself, there is nothing but my labour, that is to say, an action. This is a political language: it represents nature for me only inasmuch as I am going to transform it, it is a language thanks to which I ‘act the object’; the tree is not an image for me, it is simply the meaning of my action. But if I am not a woodcutter, I can no longer ‘speak the tree’, I can only speak *about* it, *on* it. . . .

There is therefore one language which is not mythical, it is the language of man as a producer: wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image, wherever he links his language to the making of things, metalanguage is referred to a language-object, and myth is impossible. This is why revolutionary language proper cannot be mythical. (145-6)

generation Marxists, in that the class struggle did not present itself to him as a struggle of ideas. The Leninist distinction between the myopia of the workers' spontaneous consciousness on the one hand and the theoretico-political superiority of the revolutionary "ideology" on the other hand would probably have made little sense to Marx and so would the idea that what Engels was to refer to as the "false consciousness of the so-called thinker"³⁰ would eventually be taken to mean any kind of state-sponsored or media-driven cultural mythology.

As I will demonstrate, Marx and Engels directed their attack on ideology not at the proletariat but at the "petty-bourgeois" philosophers and professional thinkers. I argue that the outrage and embarrassment over the words used by Marx and Engels to describe ideology as a "*camera obscura*" are quite misplaced. If someone's consciousness is inverted, it is not that of the laboring class, and if the consciousness of the thinker is inverted, it is not because of a universal natural process but because of the historically specific "second nature" of the thinkers, i.e. their social situation. It is probably true that the mature Marx was indeed concerned about what Theodor Adorno once described as objectively necessary distortion³¹, but, keeping in mind that *The German Ideology* is the only work of Marx's that provides a systematic account of ideology, we must separate Marx's thoughts about deceptive appearances from his *Ideologiekritik*. Since the latter is characterized by a certain kind of populism – that is, a critique of the intellectual elite in

³⁰ This famous passage is from Engels's 1893 letter to Franz Mehring (Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 50, 163-167). The full quote reads: "Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously indeed but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives. Because it is a process of thought he derives both its form and its content from pure thought, either his own or his predecessors" (ibid.,

³¹ See, for instance, Theodor Adorno, "Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre," *Wege der Forschung*, ed. Hans-Joachim Lieber, vol. CCCXLII (Ideologie, Wissenschaft, Gesellschaft: Neuere Beiträge zur Diskussion): 270-291 (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976).

the name of “ordinary” people – it is time to dispense with the view that Marx was a theorist of “voluntary servitude.”³²

The effort to pry ‘ideology’ loose from the idea of false consciousness while counteracting the expansion of the concept of ideology and recuperating Marx’s specific theory of ideology is not new. There have been a number of attempts to revisit and elucidate the problem as Marx saw it. However, most, if not all, of these projects pay scant attention to the critique of idealist philosophy which prompted the writing of *The German Ideology*. As far as they do recognize the importance of Marx and Engels’s quarrel with the Young Hegelians, these accounts generally do not go beyond a simple acknowledgment of this fact in order to move on to a reconstruction of Marx’s ideology concept that either leaves out the problem of idealism or misconstrues its relation to ideology. The work of Jorge Larraín is an example of this tendency. While Larraín has done excellent work to argue that *The German Ideology* was a “breakthrough” for Marx and retains “seminal character”³³ in Marx’s *oeuvre*, he too excludes the problem of idealist philosophy from his rendition of Marx’s ideology concept. Thus, on the one hand, Larraín correctly observes that “ideology is a particular case, a specific mode of being of certain ideas . . . [and] by no means a mere equivalent of ideas as such”³⁴, but on the other hand, he explains that “ideology refers to a limited material practice which generates ideas that misrepresent social contradictions in the interest of the ruling class,”³⁵ omitting

³² See, for example, the use of the concept in Michael Rosen’s book *On Voluntary Servitude: False Consciousness and the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

³³ Jorge Larraín, *Marxism and Ideology*, 16-7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 27. What Larraín calls ‘limited social practice’ is essentially alienation, the human creations that have gained independent power over people and force themselves on them. Further, he says that “[i]deology, therefore, is a solution at the level of social consciousness to contradictions which have not been solved in practice” (*ibid.*, 28).

the crucial detail that Marx and Engels were thinking of the limited practice of the thinker – his mental labor – not alienated labor in general.

It seems that the difficulty of reading *The German Ideology* on its own terms, rather than through the lens of later Marxist theory (either of the Althusserian, the Gramscian, or the Frankfurt School variety), has to do with the fact that analyses of Marx's ideology concept have often been motivated by a search for a simple heuristic device. Even though this search has repeatedly been frustrated, it is not abandoned. One can find in the literature a constant chorus of complaints about the lack of a unified theory of ideology in Marx, but this has not prevented scholars from insisting that we can patch together a coherent concept if we integrate all of Marx's disparate comments on any potentially relevant issue.³⁶ If we hope to make some progress in this area of inquiry, we must resist the temptation to depict Marx's *Ideologiekritik* as some kind of jigsaw puzzle, whose scattered pieces it is our task to pick up and put together. Certainly, the goal should be to come to a conclusive understanding of what Marx was talking about when he spoke of ideology, but we are mistaken to look for an exhaustive definition of ideology, that is, a formal framework replete with necessary and sufficient conditions, an abstract instrument and shortcut, a hermetically sealed theoretical formula. We must dispense with the unwarranted assumption that, in their use of the term "ideology," Marx and Engels intended to produce a tool-kit for critical inquiry, a blueprint, which lies hidden within the many works of Marx and Engels, and that, in our contemporary treatment of Marx's ideology concept, there is a mystery to be solved, a secret to be unraveled.

³⁶ Again, Larraín writes that "it is necessary to accept that the concept of ideology is not satisfactorily elaborated in Marx's writings and that in consequence it must be reconstructed and theoretically elaborated from the various scattered elements provided by the texts" (ibid., 7).

My claim that there is no enigma here at all is, of course, not to say that Marx and Engels had no distinct notion of ideology; rather, it is to maintain that the referent of their criticism is perfectly obvious. In fact, the meaning of “ideology” is not concealed but in plain sight, right at the surface. Once the subsequent development of ideology theory is put aside and *The German Ideology* is examined in its original context, it will become apparent that Marx’s ideology concept was intended to describe, explain, and denounce the theoretical and political shortcomings of other radical social critics writing in Germany at the time. And once it is realized that the perceived ambiguities in Marx on the issue of ideology stem largely from the fact that our net has been cast too widely (i.e. that our reconstructions have, in an effort to synthesize all of Marx’s most important ideas and insights, conflated “ideology” with other, related and unrelated, concepts like that of the “ruling ideas,” the “superstructure,” and the “fetish”), it will be possible to grasp Marx’s use of the term “ideology” as an element in his multifaceted and complex attack on idealist philosophy, a critique that had everything to do with Marx’s growing interest in political economy and his application of concepts of labor and class to the study of society. My main premise, then, is that “ideology” in Marx’s work began as a casual, cavalier expression, or, as Raymond Williams has put it, “a polemical nickname for kinds of thinking which neglected or ignored the material social process of which ‘consciousness’ was always a part”³⁷ and ended up an integral part of Marx’s critique of class, division of labor, and philosophical posturing.

It would, of course, be arrogant to hope to change the usage of a term that has undergone what seem like irreversible transformations. Such hope would indeed be in vain due to the very ubiquity of “ideology” not only in academic discourse but in

³⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 58.

common parlance as well, where it has taken on a life of its own.³⁸ However, in an effort, in Richard Rorty's words, to "break through impasses and to make conversation more fruitful,"³⁹ I may suggest that it is important to recover the theoretical quality of a concept that has great potential for the human sciences. Through an expository and exploratory study, I wish to indicate one means by which we may give "ideology" back its profile, its bite.

This dissertation is divided into two main parts. The first is concerned primarily with turn-of-the-century French and German thought and with the Young Hegelian movement. While this part includes some textual analysis, it is more broadly historical and synthetic. My purpose in chapters one, two, and three is to provide a general assessment of the positive role that secular theories of social change played in the origin of Marx's materialist science. Therefore, the emphasis is on the radical impetus behind Enlightenment and Hegelian philosophy. The second part is devoted in the main to a close reading or exegesis of Part 1 of *The German Ideology* in the context of some of Marx's other pre-break works. The Marxian critique of metaphysics and idealist thinking is the focus of chapters four through seven. This interdisciplinary approach is premised on the idea that the combination of intellectual history and literary analysis will yield original insights into the specific form of the Marxian critique of ideology.

One way to conceive this division is in terms of context and text, for the specific arguments in *The German Ideology* are analyzed as such *and* in relation to the larger arguments that shaped philosophical and critical discourse in Germany and beyond in the first half of the nineteenth century. Another rationale for this structure is the juxtaposition

³⁸ Most recently, for example, the administration of George W. Bush has used the phrase "ideology of hatred" to "explain" the 9/11 attacks and to legitimize the "war against terror."

³⁹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 124.

of continuity and difference, as I try to explore both the connections and the fundamental break between materialist philosophy and Left Hegelianism on the one hand and Marx's historical materialism on the other. Finally, the organization can be understood as a double-reading of Marx: once on his own perspective and once from without. That is, while the last four chapters take Marx and Engels at their word and examine the controversy over the "end of philosophy" from the vantage point of Marx and Engels, the first three are written from a critical-historical perspective, that is, one that looks back and studies the debate with an eye to the other participants involved.

Beyond the Theory of the Break

The German Ideology is generally recognized as the watershed that separates the early Marx from the mature Marx. The transition has been variously described as a transition from Young Hegelianism to Marxism proper, from Hegel to revolutionary criticism, from metaphysics to reality, or from humanism and idealism to scientific materialism. There has been a long-standing doctrine, according to which *The German Ideology* is the "first mature work of Marxism . . . transforming socialism from a utopia into a science."⁴⁰

Thus, the text has been described as, and ultimately termed by Louis Althusser, the "work of the break,"⁴¹ i.e. the work that marks the end of Marx's philosophical or ethical-rational period and the beginning of Marx's economic or historical period. In keeping

⁴⁰ Introduction to Marx and Engels, *Works: April 1845-1847*, vol. 5 of *Collected Works*, edited by Jack Cohen et al., translated by Clemens Dutt et al. (New York: International Publishers; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), xiii.

⁴¹ See, for example: "Introduction Today," 33 and 34 ("I propose to designate the writings of the break in 1845, that is, the *Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology* which first introduce Marx's new problematic, thought usually still in a partially negative and sharply polemical form, by a new formula: *the Works of the Break*.") and 36-37; "Marxism and Humanism," in *ibid.*, 227; and "Marxism and Humanism," in *For Marx* (London: Verso, 2005), 244-5.

with this framework, and insofar as the early Marx and the late Marx are believed to be separated by what Althusser has called different “problematics,”⁴² *The German Ideology* has been interpreted almost exclusively in terms of the manner in which it prefigures concepts like “mode of production,” “property relations,” and “class struggle.”⁴³

While the assessment of *The German Ideology* as Marx’s first mature text has proven to be of merit, privileging Marx’s later works has had the unfortunate effect of a preemptive censure of the works of Marx’s youth. In Lucio Colletti’s words, “It meant that it was impossible to perceive the manner in which they were related (albeit embryonically) to Marx’s later ideas, or how they might (therefore) throw new light on the work of his maturity.”⁴⁴ This tendency has also shaped the reception of *The German Ideology*. More specifically, those parts of the text that are concerned specifically with Hegelian and post-Hegelian discourse have been unduly neglected as mere vestiges of a legacy overcome. This schematic has made it difficult to see just how Marx’s critique of political economy emerged, i.e. how it connected with, and departed from, his formative politico-theoretical period. However, commentators like Colletti run the risk of repeating the mistake of retrospective reading when they try to assimilate the content of the early writings completely within the parameters of the later works.

⁴² Louis Althusser, “‘On the Young Marx’: Theoretical Questions,” in *For Marx*, 50-86.

⁴³ Wolfgang Fritz Haug, for instance, writes in his essay (and entry for the *Neues Wörterbuch des Marxismus*) on “Consciousness” that, in *The German Ideology*, “Ein neuer kategorialer Rahmen taucht auf: Produktionsweise, Reproduktion und Lebensweise, Produktivkräfte, Arbeitsteilung und Verkehrsform bzw. Produktionsverhältnisse, Eigentumsformen und damit zusammenhängende Formen der ‘Betriebsweise . . . der Arbeit’ [. . .]” (Haug, “Bewußtsein,” *Zur Kritik und Geschichte der MEGA², Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung* [1992]: 186).

⁴⁴ Lucio Colletti, “Introduction,” *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 15. Colletti has consistently pointed out the consequences of the systematic disregard for the early writings. He blames the negative response to the relatively late discovery of Marx’s early works on the heavy reliance, among the thinkers of the Second International, on Engels’s particular version of Marxist theory: “[T]he sheer rigidity of official doctrine [of ‘dialectical materialism’], the *rigor mortis* which already gripped Marxism under Stalin, contributed in no small way to the cool reception which the writings met with when they appeared, to the absences of any debate about them, and to the manner in which they were immediately classified and pigeon-holed” (ibid.).

The challenge, then, is to avoid a “theory of anticipation.” To accomplish this, the present dissertation will favor a “theory of sources”⁴⁵ while, however, presenting *The German Ideology* as a very *particular* intervention with its own “problematic.” In order to displace the narrative of the break, the first four chapters are devoted entirely to an examination of the turn-of-the-century and early nineteenth-century context of the Marxian critique of ideology. The last three chapters, by contrast, are concerned with demonstrating that *The German Ideology* was not only a genuine transition from Marx’s radical philosophy to the work leading up to *Capital*, i.e. that it contains conjunctures as well as disjunctures, but also that it cannot be contained within a simple formula (immature/mature) or within a chronological continuum (from early to later). As most other texts produced by most other thinkers, *The German Ideology* raises specific questions, offers specific solutions, and opens up specific avenues of thinking. The concept of ideology *qua* mental labor, which is patently mature and yet was never again picked up by the mature Marx, serves as a paradigm for the particular nature of *The German Ideology*. An elaborate textual analysis will demonstrate that Marx and Engels’s critique of mental labor constitutes a distinctive moment in Marx’s thinking that grew out of the Young Hegelian end-of-philosophy movement at the same time that it signaled a radical departure toward a social, historical, and economic interpretation of materialist principles.

In the 1970’s, Louis Althusser declared notoriously that “Marx’s early works do not have to be taken into account”⁴⁶ and that Marxists should begin their study of Marx with the “Theses on Feuerbach,” which Althusser claimed mark a fundamental shift in

⁴⁵ Althusser has guarded against both (Althusser, *For Marx*, 56).

⁴⁶ Louis Althusser, “Lenin and Philosophy,” in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 20.

Marx's work, a rupture that put to an end the anthropological and "historicist"⁴⁷ Marx and inaugurates the real Marx. Drawing on Gaston Bachelard's work in the philosophy of science, Althusser argues that "Marx has opened up to scientific knowledge a new, third scientific continent, the continent of History, by an epistemological break whose first still uncertain strokes are inscribed in *The German Ideology* after having been announced in the *Theses on Feuerbach*."⁴⁸ However, as Althusser had asserted a number of years earlier, this break was not completed until 1845: "*The German Ideology* is the first work indicating a conscious and definitive rupture with Feuerbach's philosophy and his influence."⁴⁹ If Althusser's extreme anti-Hegelian (and hence anti-pre-1845-Marx) posture seems unwarranted or at least excessive now, it is because he has arguably been a little too uncritical of orthodox Marxism. At the same time, Althusser made an important contribution to Marxist theory when he emphasized the fact that *The German Ideology* really was Marx's last intense engagement with his Young Hegelian contemporaries and gestured unmistakably beyond the confines of traditional philosophy. Even critic Jon Elster has commended *The German Ideology* for being intensely anti-idealist⁵⁰, more so

⁴⁷ By this, Althusser means the idealist, organic approach to history that posits coherent entities without contradictions.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 22. The other two "continents" that Althusser was referring to are the theoretical 'regions' of mathematics and physics.

⁴⁹ Louis Althusser, "Feuerbach's 'Philosophical Manifestoes'," in *For Marx*, 45. It is important to note that Althusser did not conceive of this rupture as the "end of philosophy"; rather, he implicitly criticized Marx for equating Hegel's philosophy with philosophy as such and for getting perilously close to both theoretical pragmatism (see, for instance, "Introduction: Today," in *For Marx*, 28-30) and positivism (e.g. *ibid.*, 34). After all, much of Althusser's defense of Marx and Lenin is the project of defining the principles and purpose of a "Marxist philosophy" (i.e. Marxist science) or "Theory." (See, for example, "On the Materialist Dialectic," in *For Marx*, 162).

⁵⁰ This is interesting in light of Elster's argument that Marx's theory of history was essentially teleological and Hegelian. See Jon Elster's *Making Sense of Marx*, Studies in Marxism and Social Theory (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 107-118. This harsh and, as large parts of the review literature agree, inaccurate portrayal is relevant here because rational choice theorist and analytic philosopher Elster exempts *The German Ideology* from his charge, highlighting the particular importance of this text in Marx's work. Incidentally, Elster attributes the sober and anti-romantic tone of *The German Ideology* to Engels's role in the production of the manuscript, a view which contrasts starkly with another common assertion, such as it has been formulated by Colletti, that Engels was the more metaphysical of the two thinkers and less critical of Hegel.

than even some of Marx's later work, such as *Grundrisse*. However, the notion of "maturity" is misleading due to its psychological connotations. While the text is "mature" in the sense that it substituted, in Robert Tucker's words, "philosophical communism" with "scientific socialism" by disavowing notions like "Man," "(self-)alienation," and "sensuousness" in favor of "human relations," "society," "production," and "labor"⁵¹, it would be wrong to portray this change as the result of an evolution from adolescence and naïveté to adulthood and wisdom. Rather, the change must be conceived, and is conceived here, historically, i.e. in terms of the political climate in Germany and Europe at the time and its echoes in the conversations and disputes that Marx was engaged in, which forced him to rethink his earlier commitment to idealist and unhistorical interpretations of Hegel.

In other words, it is certainly sensible to accept the "turning point" view, but it is also necessary to grasp the turn as a process that was not only complicated and intricate but also larger than the individual thinker Marx. In order to avoid mistaking Marx's critique of philosophy for the intellectual itinerary of an isolated mind, then, it is essential that we comprehend Marx's turn as the outcome of a confrontation, in which not only Marx but also his adversaries played a pivotal role in pushing, not always effectively,

⁵¹ Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001, 165. Regarding the difference between the early and the late Marx, Tucker also notes: "For the great majority of Marxists, and especially for the Communists, the mature system remains as always the truly serious and significant creation of Marx, and original Marxism appears at most an interesting curiosity out of his youth" (ibid., 167). See also Tucker's note on the "minority" interpretation: the existentialist, phenomenological, moral, and religious privileging of the early Marx (ibid., note *). Tucker's own conclusion, against that of Althusser and, say, Marcuse, who also claimed that Marx's early writings should not be overemphasized, is that there were "no two Marxisms but one" (ibid., 172) and that "mature Marxism is an organic outgrowth of original Marxism" (ibid., 174), an argument he sees corroborated by Marx and Engels themselves. (The reference to "two Marxisms" is to Alvin Gouldner's book of the same title: *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* [New York: Seabury Press, 1980]. For a useful review of the literature on the subject until the publication of Gouldner's work, see, for instance, Walter L. Adamson, "Marx's Four Histories: An Approach to His Intellectual Development," *History and Theory* 20, no. 4 [Dec. 1981].)

beyond the conservative aspects of Hegelian thought and laying the foundations for a radical social science. The radical mode(s) of thinking emerged against the conservative mode(s) by identifying, theorizing, and separating its opponents. As my analysis of Young Hegelian thought will show, secular notions of conflict and progress, radical as they were vis-à-vis the Protestant philosophy and the existing social order, were often fraught with teleological, essentialist, and intellectualist preconceptions which ended up buttressing both that traditional philosophy and the socio-economic *status quo* and its political regime.

That Marx and Engels were able to ground dialectical thought in political economy means that their approach was more effective than that of Bauer and Feuerbach in escaping the idealist fallacies inherited from Hegel and metaphysics. It does not mean, however, that Bauer and Feuerbach produced nothing revolutionary – an impression that can easily be gained from Marx’s own commentary on Bauer and Feuerbach from 1834 and onwards. To the contrary, the Young Hegelian emphasis on praxis, material reality, human history, self-consciousness, etc. was a truly radical step in “worlding” (making worldly) and politicizing the critical interpretation of Hegelian thought. Therefore, the notion of a simple and clean break separating Marx neatly from his own past and from the contemporary Left philosophy is problematic in that it conjures images of Marx as a lone genius. Those images must be rejected simply because they lend themselves to a kind of cult of personality, based as they are on a lack of understanding of intellectual context and on a crude dismissal of Marx’s opponents. Moreover, unless the writings of Feuerbach, Bauer, Stirner, etc. are considered together with the writings of Marx and Engels, it is difficult to gauge the exact nature of the differences between them. Finally,

in order to understand why Marx went to great pains to discuss every argument in Stirner's book *The Ego*, we must take seriously the fact that Marx took Stirner's critique seriously, that is, considered it a threat – despite Marx's polemical contentions to the contrary. Marx and Engels stressed their disagreements with the Young Hegelians because they no longer wished to be aligned with them. This should not lead us to believe that the relation between Marx's thought and that of Feuerbach, Bauer, and, of course, Hegel, was purely negative. Rather, we can describe this relation as dialectical in the sense that the ideas negated by Marx were “*aufgehoben*” – both sublated and preserved.⁵² Moreover, it is only logical that there should be continuities between Marx and the thinkers with whom he had either personally studied, worked, and become radicalized; who had a similar background, academically and politically; or who simply wrote about related questions from related perspectives. In fact, it is these continuities that make Marx's subsequent intervention stand out all the more vividly.

Unlike the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, not to mention *The Holy Family*, *The German Ideology* did not suffer directly from the denigration of the early works; however, the work's reception has been very much affected by a general lack of interest in Marx's formative years. To be precise, the manuscript parts on Bauer, Stirner, and the True Socialists have been almost completely ignored. Instead, the incomplete and disjointed section on Feuerbach, which contains a number of general statements and claims, has been the subject and sole focus in discussions of the text. Furthermore, Marx and Engels's reflections in this first part, titled “I. Feuerbach,” have been treated as full-

⁵² For a set of recent contributions to the debate over the complicated relation between Marx and Hegel, see, for instance, Tony Burns and Ian Fraser (eds.), *The Hegel-Marx Connection* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000 and London: Macmillan Press, 2000). A classic work that discusses Marx and Hegel together is Jean Hyppolite's *Studies on Marx and Hegel* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

fledged theories and methodological doctrines⁵³, obscuring the fact that the main body of this part of the manuscript is anything but a preliminary rough sketch.⁵⁴ The assumption that only the first one hundred pages of *The German Ideology* are of seminal value because, like the “Theses,” they contain the “nucleus” of Marx’s entire critical approach to society and history,⁵⁵ has had far-reaching effects on key concepts in Marxist theory. A case in point is the ideology concept. Not surprisingly, given the interpretive trend described above, there has been a tacit agreement that only in “I. Feuerbach” we will find definitive answers to the question of what Marx had to say about the subject of ideology. Unfortunately, this notion has led to much disappointment over what has appeared to be an absence of a unified “theory of ideology.” Much confusion has arisen over what seem to be contradictory statements about the origin and role of ideology, and this confusion has given rise to endless and, I would argue, futile debates over the epistemological, psychological, social dimensions of Marx’s ideology concept.⁵⁶

One constant complaint in the literature on “ideology” in Marx is that it is supposedly fraught with ambiguity. To cite just one example, we may take McLellan’s remark as representative. He states about Marx that “his comments on ideology tend to be

⁵³ There is widespread agreement on this point. Even critical commentators such as neo-Marxist Henri Lefebvre have maintained that the significance of *The German Ideology* lies in its role as a foundational text, rather than in its convoluted discussions and open problematizations. Lefebvre, for instance, says that “*The German Ideology* . . . indicates the fundamental theses of historical materialism (*Dialectical Materialism*, trans. John Sturrock [London: Jomathan Cape, 1968], 71).

⁵⁴ Inge Taubert et al., “Einführung zur Vorabpublikation,” in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Joseph Weydemeyer, *Die Deutsche Ideologie: Artikel, Druckvorlagen und Notizen zu I. Feuerbach and II. Sankt Bruno*, ed. Inge Taubert et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), 21*.

⁵⁵ This notion goes back to a comment Friedrich Engels made many years after he and Marx wrote *The German Ideology*. In the foreword to his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Engels explained that the “Theses,” as short as they were, contained the ‘brilliant germ’ of historical materialism.

⁵⁶ For a fairly comprehensive and yet concise review of the literature on Marx’s concept of ideology from about 1970 to 1990, see, for instance, Christopher L. Pines, *Ideology and False Consciousness: Marx and his Historical Progenitors* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 1-16. Pines himself wants to resurrect a Marxian concept of false consciousness but, in so doing, once again reduces the ideology discussion to the simple truth – falsehood dichotomy.

obiter dicta and he never produced a coherent account.”⁵⁷ In this regard, not much has changed since the 1970’s, which gave birth to a renewed interest in ideology theory. Martin Seliger, for instance, argued then that “Marx and Engels’s utterances on the problem of ideology exhibit aspects not so much ‘related’, as different.”⁵⁸ Ironically, despite this consensus view, there is a tendency to impute an *implicit* “theory” of ideology to Marx. In Jorge Larraín’s insightful work on the topic, for instance, we find the following assertion:

[T]he task of ascertaining the specific, critical character of ideology in Marx confronts the particular difficulty that there is no general definition of systematic treatment of the concept in his writings which provides a definitive version. Of course, Marx gives numerous clues by using the concept in a certain way and by describing some of its essential features in the context of concrete analyses. But on the whole it is necessary to accept that the concept of ideology is not satisfactorily elaborated in Marx’s writings and that in consequence it must be reconstructed and theoretically elaborated from the various scattered elements provided by the texts.⁵⁹

Larraín then goes on to say that “The theses brilliantly sketch some of the crucial ideas which were to be developed in the first chapter of *The German Ideology* . . . [which] first presented an integral account of historical materialism and, also, for the first time, introduced the concept of ideology”⁶⁰ in order to maintain that “[a]part from the 1859 ‘Preface’, *The German Ideology* is the only place where one can find a general exposition of Marx’s principal ideas about society and history”⁶¹ and that even though in it, “one does not find a formal definition or a systematic treatment of ideology,”⁶² it is clear that without *The German Ideology*, we would not have a Marxian concept of ideology. He

⁵⁷ David McLellan, *Ideology* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 9.

⁵⁸ Martin Seliger, *The Marxist Conception of Ideology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 27.

⁵⁹ Jorge Larraín, *Marxism and Ideology* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1983), 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 15.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 16.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 17.

reiterates this point further down in the same work when he says about *The German Ideology* that “there can be little doubt as to its overall significance for the concept of ideology. Other texts are even less systematic and certainly no single one deals with ideology as fully as *The German Ideology*.”⁶³ Larraín is correct when he stresses that the key to Marx’s ideology concept should probably be sought in the text that treats it most exhaustively, but he, like the majority of the literature, speaks of the “concept” of ideology as though it was intended as a formal category with necessary and sufficient conditions, rather than as a polemical term with a concrete content.

Much of the debate over the correct definition of “ideology” can be brought to a swift end when the hunt for a “definition” is abandoned in favor of a more thoroughly historical reading, especially of the forgotten parts, of *The German Ideology*. In order to do that, we must ask about intentions and objectives, as unpopular as this may be. Further, Marx’s ideology concept must be grasped beyond the narrow confines of the famous “*camera obscura*” passage⁶⁴, which, incidentally, is the only section of *The German Ideology* that was verifiably written by Engels alone⁶⁵, and placed firmly in the larger framework of Marx’s dispute with the Young Hegelians and radical (post)Enlightenment philosophy. What I hope to show is that the general claims in “I. Feuerbach” about the materialist method and the primacy of the material production can only be interpreted in the context of turn-of-the-century and early nineteenth-century leftist discourse about the actual social process, the reality of class, alienation and

⁶³ Ibid., 54.

⁶⁴ One example for the unfortunate effects of the fixation upon the *camera obscura* metaphor is Sarah Kofman’s essay on Marx in *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology* (London: The Athlone Press, 1973), especially “Marx -- Black Magic,” 1-20. Kofman argues more creatively than meaningfully that Marx’s concept of ideology was wrong because it was not Foucauldian or Derridean and that Marx’s own use of metaphor betrays the falsity of his notion of an extra-metaphorical/discursive/specular reality.

⁶⁵ Taubert et al., “Einführung zur Vorabpublikation,” in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Joseph Weydemeyer, *Die Deutsche Ideologie: Artikel, Druckvorlagen und Notizen*, 20*.

dehumanization, revolutionary change, freedom, historical struggles, labor, etc.

Moreover, I will demonstrate that “ideology” was not intended by Marx and Engels as a recipe to understand all of those issues, as is oftentimes suggested; rather, it was a term employed strategically to theorize precisely the connection, or rather the disconnect, between theoretical discourse and manual labor in class society. More precisely, the argument of this dissertation is that when Marx and Engels’s use of the word “ideology” is understood as part of their critique of the idealist distortions in the supposedly “critical” theories of the post-Hegelian philosophers, it becomes clear that “ideology” referred to a historically specific species of intellectual labor: that which is compelled, as Keya Ganguly writes, “to assume that a revolution in thought or intellection can itself produce meaningful social transformation” and that “talk of struggle is . . . the same as struggle itself.”⁶⁶ This connection between the critique of idealism and the Marxian critique of ideology is seldom acknowledged and never detailed.⁶⁷ The challenge I wish to take on, then, is to analyze the Marxian understanding of ideology *qua* mental labor. A prominent associate of the Frankfurt School once expressed this understanding as the

⁶⁶ Keya Ganguly, “Introduction: After Resignation and Against Conformity,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* (Intellectual Labor), volume 108, number 2, Spring 2009: 239-47.

⁶⁷ This is not to say that the coincidence of ideology and philosophy is not recognized in the literature. One example of such recognition is D.H. Rashid’s chapter on “Ideology and Philosophy,” in D.J. Manning (ed.), *The Form of Ideology: Investigations into the Sense of Ideological Reasoning with a View to Giving an Account of its Place in Political Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), 38-52. Another example is Luis A. Conde-Costas’s dissertation *The Marxist Theory of Ideology: A Conceptual Analysis* (Uppsala: Academiae Upsaliensis, 1991). Conde-Costas states, for instance, “Marx and Engels use the ideology concept against any argument or belief which is not predicated on the correct method represented by historical materialism” (ibid., 53). Conde-Costas also points out that Marx and Engels used the term “philosophy” in a general sense and included also historians, lawyers, etc. Conde-Costas is also one of the few scholars who has noted the importance of the concept of the division between mental and manual labor, albeit only in passing (e.g., ibid., 54). So he remarks in his discussion of classical political economy as ideology,

Ideological thought, as opposed to other forms of thought which might blur social conditions or interfere in the transmission of knowledge, emerges with the inception of private ownership, the consequence of the division of labor. This division, “truly such” from that point in time when mental and manual labor part ways, is a precondition of the social estrangement reproduced by consciousness and labeled by Marx and Engels’ ideology. (Ibid., 66)

claim that “[t]he conceptual mode of thought arose in history as the basis of intellectual labour inherently divided from manual labour.”⁶⁸

The goal of this dissertation is to lay bare Marx’s point of departure in 1845 in order to facilitate a better understanding of his break-through to a radically anti-metaphysical analysis of modern class society. I hope to show that the significance of *The German Ideology* lies in its economic account of ideology *qua* idealist philosophy as a product of the division between head and hand. By developing a critique of the study of ideas, i.e. a critique of “ideo-logy,” as a historically specific form of practice, namely one detached from immediately material life, or, *apropos* Hegel, from work and struggle, Marx managed to leave behind not only his former friend Bauer but also his erstwhile idol and fellow materialist Feuerbach as well as the anti-humanist Stirner – and their various attempts to leave behind Hegel’s abstract idealism. It will turn out that *The German Ideology* does indeed mark a break in the sense that it affected a paradigmatic change in Marx’s itinerary as a revolutionary thinker. This change must be conceived as an advance but not necessarily a linear one. Moreover, the change and advance cannot be affixed to *The German Ideology* alone, inasmuch as it spills over into both sides of the manifest turning point in 1845/46 (with the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, for instance, foreshadowing Marx’s later occupation with political economy and Marx’s 1847 response to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s book *The Philosophy of Poverty* constituting a continuation of Marx’s protracted farewell to philosophy). It will further be argued that the rupture performed by *The German Ideology* is in fact a rupture that runs right through the text itself, for *The German Ideology* disavows – firmly and consistently

⁶⁸ Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (London: MacMillan Press, 1978), 203.

– all the “conjuring tricks” of bourgeois “pure consciousness” *before* the development of key concepts of Marx’s economic writings, such as the concept of the relations of production (rather than the less specific “form of intercourse”), the concept of the private ownership of the means of production (as opposed to private property in general and means of production in general), and the concept of labor power.⁶⁹

I will show that it is the thoroughgoing examination of the constant risk of slippage from fundamentally secular theory to idealist inversion that enabled Marx and Engels to push toward a scientific conception of reality as a fully materialist dialectic. Two brief comments are appropriate here. Firstly, an awareness of the ever-present problem of idealist distortion does not need to descend into what has been argued to be a kind of paranoid fear of deviation.⁷⁰ While it is true that Soviet Marxism instrumentalized the materialism-idealism binary to police against any inner-Marxist heterodoxy, and while it is also true that orthodox Marxism, as defined by the official party line in the former Communist bloc, enforced a return to a pre-Marxist metaphysic of the material, i.e. another kind of idealism, it is nonetheless useful to uphold the basic distinction between, on the one hand, theories that begin and end with practice and, on the other hand, philosophies steeped in different kinds of abstract-universalist and *apriorist* myths. Secondly, Althusser’s scandalous affirmation of Lenin’s thesis that philosophy is nothing but the “age-old struggle between two tendencies: idealism and materialism,”⁷¹ a “strange

⁶⁹ See, for example, Larraín, *Marxism and Ideology*, 16. Larraín cites Rafael Echeverría’s unpublished doctoral dissertation here: “Marx’s Concept of Science” (Birkbeck College, London University, 1978).

⁷⁰ The essay on “Idealismus/Materialismus” in a new German dictionary on Marxism, for instance, begins by “historicizing” the terms by arguing that the notion of idealism as the “enemy” is merely a reversal of earlier denunciations of materialism (Wolfgang Fritz Haug, “Idealismus/Materialismus,” vol. 6/I of *Historisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus* (Hamburg: Argument, 2004, 607.)

⁷¹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 32-3. This thesis is obviously connected to Marx and Engels’s argument in *The German Ideology* that ideology has no history. Making such a direct link between ideology and philosophy, Althusser demonstrates that, at least at one point, was acutely aware of this original formulation. Althusser further develops this thought by talking about philosophy as “no more than the repetition of the clash between two fundamental tendencies,” a “*game for nothing*,” a both a “Holzweg”

theoretical site where nothing really happens, nothing but this *repetition* of nothing”⁷² has never been adequately addressed and, I maintain, continues to loom large for Marxist philosophers despite its effective repression.

This struggle goes back to Marx and can be seen to take place within Marx’s own work, including that of his maturity. As has been widely acknowledged, Marx continued to employ Hegelian concepts, including some more problematic ones such as the concept of necessity (as in the necessity of capitalism and human suffering as a positive condition for the successful revolution). The distinction between deep structure and surface appearances is another prime example of the Hegelian legacy in *Capital*. Especially in this regard, *The German Ideology* occupies a pivotal position in Marx’s effort to avoid the pitfalls not only of classical Idealist philosophy and its remnants but also of those of abstract materialism. Ultimately, this dissertation argues, Marx and Engels in fact accomplished their departure from the metaphysical mode of thinking, that is, they successfully “settled accounts with their erstwhile philosophical conscience.”⁷³

The imperative to pay sustained attention to the pre-*Capital* Marx is all the more pressing today because ignorance in this regard has given free rein to a ready appropriation of Marx’s early works not only by liberal agendas and philosophy classes on ethics but by the heirs of E. P. Thompson’s moralist subjectivism.⁷⁴ I will not engage here in a refutation of the postulate of Marx as humanist⁷⁵; suffice it to say only that, if

and “Kampfplatz,” as a permanent “tendency struggle” (33-34).

⁷² Ibid., 33.

⁷³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, 29 (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 264.

⁷⁴ For the most sustained critique of Thompson’s famous attack on Althusserian Marxism (*The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978]), see Perry Anderson’s *Arguments Within English Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1980).

⁷⁵ One classic position in this tradition is that of Raya Dunayevskaya. See, for instance, her second major work *Philosophy and Revolution: From Hegel to Sartre, and from Marx to Mao* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1973).

nothing else, *The German Ideology* is a singular testament to the steady recession in Marx's thinking of the romantic figure of "Man" as the universal essence uniting all really existing "men" and women *throughout* history *a priori*. Of course, Marx had a concept of the human potential to be free (from nature), conscious (and self-conscious), and individual (in will, talent, and realization thereof); of course, he posited the possibility of a society based on a full range of human capacity, creativity, control, and enjoyment, from Marx's thinking. However, Marx labored systematically, even before the "break," to combat, rather than endorse, abstract universals, normative constructs, and idealizations of society. I maintain that the basic premise of Marx and Engels's critique of the German ideology is that speculations about the "meaning" of human history, the "task" of negation, or the "goal" of social transformation are intrinsic to the form of mental labor in class society. According to Marx and Engels, the belief in ideal transcendence is the peculiar and fully predictable result of ideal occupations. Humanist philosophies, while typically critical of supernatural explanations, retain such belief by subordinating practical change to the theoretical question of "what it is to be human," a question that functions to mediate in consciousness what are irreconcilable social contradictions in reality.⁷⁶

In line with the humanist perspective is the criticism – generally advanced by those who believe that the term "Marxist science" is a mistake or contradiction – that *The German Ideology* is determinist and mechanical in its depiction of the relation between

⁷⁶ See Daniel Brudney's *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). Brudney wants to interpret the early Marx, including the Marx of *The German Ideology*, as speaking to the question of "the good life" and "human nature." The result is a rather strained attempt to argue for a Marxist moral philosophy. However, not all Marxist humanisms are the same. It is possible to retain notions such as "alienation (or "objectification") without succumbing to illusions of an eschatological realization of some essential human "nature." Sophisticated Marxist thinkers who can be said to have interpreted Marx's thought in a humanist direction are: Lukács, Benjamin and Marcuse, Lucien Goldmann, Sartre and Fanon, Paolo Freire, Gramsci, and Edward Said.

base and superstructure. It is this accusation that must be negotiated here. How can we read *The German Ideology* as a post-humanist work without defending economic reductionism and without jettisoning important philosophical notions such as the individual, freedom, and even consciousness, which undoubtedly occupy a central place in Marx's theory? The answer is that Marx never rejected abstraction; rather, he viewed it in terms of its conditions of possibility and its systemic problems. This is merely one instance in which Marx not only stood Hegelian concepts the right way up but explained them by rooting them in social life, in the concrete economic reality of a particular mode of "intercourse." Philosophical ideas do not disappear from Marx's work; rather, they are concretized and historicized in a profoundly non-vulgar way.

Marx's Class Theory of Consciousness

Perhaps the most fundamental concept in Hegelian philosophy is that of Consciousness, and it is precisely this concept that Marx effectively demystified in his debate with the Young Hegelians. By folding his polemical discussions into what I call a "class theory of consciousness," Marx achieves the ultimate feat: he shows his opponents' views as incorrect on the basis not of a failure of logic or morality but on the basis of objective (but not ineluctable) necessities. By using the term "ideology" to refer to the historically specific form of consciousness that Marx saw himself confronted with, he was able to frame his critical negation of certain types of radical thought in a positive account of labor. Hence, I show that the concept of ideology, once stripped of its twentieth-century sense and restored to its original meaning, allows us to locate the full impact of Marx's critique of philosophy. I argue that grasping Marx's ideology concept as a pre-

Mannheimian or pre-Heideggerian doctrine of thinking qua being is a return to the idealism that Marx aimed to displace. Although it would seem obvious that neither being nor consciousness as formal constructs held any particular meaning for Marx, especially not after 1845, this is not apparent from the reception of *The German Ideology*. Too often, it has been asserted – mostly by thinkers sympathetic to Mannheim’s or Heidegger’s preoccupation with the cultural and cognitive limits of perception – that ideology for Marx was a kind of universal category to describe the inescapability of the horizons of subjectivity. As a result, Marx’s theory of ideology has been turned inside out. Paul Ricoeur, for example, has noted that “[t]he concept of ideology may be large enough to cover not only distortions but all representations, all *Vorstellungen*.”⁷⁷ Too often, ideology has been taken to be another word for “ideas,” and, mostly due to the undue privileging of the incomplete “Introduction,” commentators have been content to either denounce or endorse the famous passages on consciousness as a set of “reflexes” and “echoes,” on the “dominant ideas,” and on ideology as “inversion” and “distortion.” What has not been attempted is a systematic inquiry into the connection between these statements and images on the one hand and the Marxian concept of intellectual labor, which only becomes clear when the entire manuscript is considered, on the other. In particular, the long and painstakingly meticulous analysis of Stirner’s *Der Einzige und*

⁷⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 77. This interpretation, in Ricoeur’s eyes, is entirely justified because, even though the referent of “ideology” is clearly specified by Marx and Engels, there is an “extended” theory of ideology at work in the text. Thus Ricoeur states:

In the preface which opens *The German Ideology*, we have the first suggestion of ideology’s meaning in the text. Fundamentally the term designates the Young Hegelians and therefore all that proceeded from the decomposition of the Hegelian system. It is from this basis that the concept is extended to all forms of production which are not properly economic, such as law, the state, art, religion, and philosophy. We must never forget, then, the initial basis of his concept as a polemical term addressed to a certain school of thought. (Ibid.)

If this last statement is correct, Ricoeur is wrong to claim that “all forms” of non-economic production are ideological from Marx’s point of view. As I will show later on, science is clearly outside of what Marx and Engels define as ideology.

sein Eigentum, which, for all intents and purposes, must be regarded as the center piece and original core of the first volume of *The German Ideology*, has rarely been scrutinized, especially not in terms of its role for Marx's critique of intellectual labor.

This omission has resulted in an inadequate understanding of Marx's rejection of philosophy. One can go so far as to assert that the problem of the division between mental and manual labor has not only become decoupled from the (Marxist) theory of ideology but also dropped from sight completely. For this reason, the main impetus behind, and particular achievement of, *The German Ideology* has largely eluded Marx scholars and Marxist theorists. Consequently, the relation between ideology and religion and their specific connection with the "dominant ideas" has been misapprehended as an argument about cultural hegemony and the reproduction of economic structures through control of superstructural forms.⁷⁸ Similarly, the juxtaposition between ideology and science has been misinterpreted as a paradigmatic case of naïve empiricism, in manifest contradiction with the notion, ascribed to Marx, that all consciousness is cut off from the objective world. The general sense of puzzlement about these and related issues brings to light a lack of appreciation for the fact that *The German Ideology* was not another philosophy of consciousness but a theory (of the materialist causes) of idealist thought. In order to fill this gap in Marxist scholarship, it is necessary to engage Marx and Engels's specific arguments against the "Leipzig Council" and to grasp their concept of ideology as more than a radicalization and correction: as a materialist *account of* the Young Hegelian failure to go beyond the critique of religion.

⁷⁸ For the now classic critique of this view, see Nicholas Abercrombie, et al., *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980).

Further, this dissertation promises to elucidate the central relevance of the *post-*Hegelian context for Marxian ideology theory. I wish to provide an explanation for the fact, seldom noted, that Marx used the term “ideologist(s)” to refer not to Hegel but to his critics, the Young Hegelians. How can we make sense of the apparently small but significant detail that the most provocative materialist attack on philosophical idealism in 1845, Stirner’s book *Der Einzige*, and the most outspoken Left attack on French socialism at that time, True Socialism, earned what to Marx was clearly an epithet: that of being nothing but ideology? As I will demonstrate, this problem can be resolved by way of a clarification of the connection between *The German Ideology* and the history of materialist thought, including the turn of the century French philosophical movement called *idéologie* and its protagonist, Destutt de Tracy, whom Marx had been reading immediately prior to his move to Brussels. What becomes evident is that Marx was interested in uncovering the idealism not of Hegel’s philosophy but of its radical descendants. Taking the term “ideology” from the French context and using it in the German context was one way for Marx and Engels to criticize the bourgeois myopia and credulity of the Young Hegelians. An analysis of this critique makes visible the direct relation between the term “ideology” and the debates *among* materialist thinkers over how to conceive a revolutionary theory of social reality and historical change. What emerged from these debates, in the work of Marx, was a critique of mental labor as a form of practice conditioned by the laws of class structure – a critique of the idealist predilections that are built into the philosophical profession and work behind the backs, as it were, of most materialistically inclined thinkers.

The most immediate context, however, while centrally relevant, is not the whole story. As I have suggested, one of my main contentions in this dissertation is that Marx's historical materialism was ultimately also a response not merely to German objective Idealism but also to the French Enlightenment. Again, thinking of this situation exclusively in terms of difference would be one-sided. When I speak of a "response," I have in mind both a divergence and a convergence, that is, Marx and Engels's basic affiliation with, *and* full departure from, these philosophical traditions during the revolutionary years leading up to 1848. Acknowledging specifically the link between Marx and the sensualism of the *idéologues* may seem counterintuitive, but it has a distinct advantage over another type of connection that has been made by historians and critics in the past: the connection between Napoleon Bonaparte and Marx. My association of Marx with Tracy, and attendant disassociation of Marx from Napoleon, entails a divorce of the Marxian ideology concept from the trajectory of ultra-conservative pragmatism and a rejection of arguments such as that of Raymond Williams who has maintained, in his essay on "Ideology" in *Marxism and Literature*, that the authors of *The German Ideology* were using the term in "the same tone of contemptuous practicality. . . ." ⁷⁹ as Napoleon. While this claim is more specific than the common assertion that Marx and Napoleon shared a "derogatory" concept of ideology, both suggest that Marx's critique of philosophy was as anti-intellectualist as Napoleon's attack on the ideologists. This is misleading because the two approaches are, quite obviously,

⁷⁹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 58. Williams does, however, qualify this statement by adding that "[i]n place of Napoleon's conservative (and suitably vague) standard of 'knowledge of the human heart and of the lessons of history', Marx and Engels introduced 'the real ground of history' – the process of production and self-production – from which the 'origins and growth' of 'different theoretical products' could be traced. The simple cynicism of the appeal to 'self-interest' became a critical diagnosis of the real basis of all ideas..." (ibid.).

based on two diametrically opposed theoretico-political agendas.⁸⁰ Thus, it makes more sense to discuss the link between Tracy's "positive" and Marx's "negative" concepts of ideology than rely on the superficial resemblance between Napoleon's and Marx's critique of ideologists.

In his book *Ideology: An Introduction*⁸¹, Terry Eagleton states about *The German Ideology* that the "problem [with the confusion over Marx's ideology concept] may spring from the fact that the term "consciousness" is pressed into double service. It can mean "mental life" in general, or it can allude more specifically to particular historical systems of beliefs (religious, juridical, political and so on)."⁸² This insight points to the crucial fact that Marx and Engels distinguished between ideas in general and ideology in particular: consciousness as a human attribute and consciousness as a mode of ideational production that is characteristic of all class societies but takes on specific shapes and forms in bourgeois society. While the first of these meanings is a simple fact for Marx and Engels, the second is central to their critique of German philosophy. Inasmuch as mental labor is the exemption from manual labor and therefore a form of privilege for the

⁸⁰ Harold Mah is one of the few writers who agree with this. Against the notion that Napoleon should be considered the originator of Marx's concept of ideology, he argues that "[h]is contempt for philosophy seems to be merely a variation of the conventional prejudice of the practical-minded Realpolitiker against intellectuals" (*The End of Philosophy, the Origin of 'Ideology': Karl Marx and the Crisis of the Young Hegelians* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987], 5).

⁸¹ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991). A second edition of this work has been published in 2007.

⁸² Ibid., 73. Others have made similar remarks regarding the meaning of "consciousness" and its relation to "ideology" in this text. Raymond Williams, for example, in the chapter mentioned above, notes, "Everything then turns, of course, on the definition of 'consciousness.' The definition adopted, polemically, by Marx and Engels, is in effect their definition of ideology: not 'practical consciousness' but 'self-dependent theory' . . . [W]e are left with a much more limited and in that respect more plausible definition of ideology. Since 'consciousness', including 'conceptions, thoughts, ideas', can hardly be asserted to be non-existent in the 'mass of men' [which, according to Marx, is said not to share the 'theoretical notions' of the ideologists], the definition falls back to a *kind* of consciousness, and certain *kinds* of conceptions, thought, and ideas, which are specifically 'ideological' . . . Ideology is then separated theory. (*Marxism and Literature*, 65-6)

What Williams forgets to mention is the importance of class and the specific connection between "self-dependent theory" and idealist distortions.

dominant class, consciousness and class have been connected historically. However, while consciousness as the exclusive vocation of the dominant class has existed since the origin of the institution of a priestly caste, the acute disarticulation of “pure thought” under capitalism is a consequence of the advanced state of the division between intellectual and immediately practical labor. Further, the systematic “study of ideas” only becomes possible in a world where, as Marx was to put it in the *Communist Manifesto*, “all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned.”⁸³ In other words, consciousness *qua* pure thought (ideology in an extended sense) is proper to all class societies, but metaphysics *qua* science of ideas (ideology in a strict sense) is distinctly modern. Ideology is that kind of philosophy or mental labor that aspires to be fully secular and yet is thoroughly preoccupied with religion, that aspires to be radically materialistic but continues to attribute special powers to immaterial realms.

It is possible that the confusion Eagleton calls attention to, and tries to solve, is due to the fact that Marxist scholars have traditionally read *The German Ideology* with a sole focus on the base-superstructure doctrine, which has in turn been read as a primarily methodological problem. Consequently, the question that has animated much of the discussion of this text is what it says about the relationship between thought and reality. This tendency is in full accord with what Perry Anderson has described as the “obsessive methodologism” of Western Marxism. Attributing the shift within Marxism away from economics and politics to philosophy, Anderson notes:

No philosopher within the Western Marxist tradition ever claimed that the main or ultimate aim of historical materialism was a theory of knowledge. But the common assumption of virtually all was that the *preliminary* task of theoretical research within Marxism was to disengage the rules of social enquiry discovered

⁸³ Robert C. Tucker, “Manifesto of the Communist Party, in *Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978 [1972], 2nd edition), 476.

by Marx . . . and if necessary to complete them. The result was . . . a prolonged and intricate Discourse on Method.⁸⁴

The imposition of abstract concerns about the difference between true and false consciousness, about the causes of cognitive distortion, about the reflection theory, and about essence versus appearance in Marx's thought, however, is only partly justified by the philosophical bent of his early writings, as even the early writings are not as esoteric as the ruminations on materialism produced by the second generation Marxists have made them out to be (Lukács, Sartre, Della Volpe, Adorno, and others). In light of this, it is important to bear in mind that *The German Ideology* gives us *not a philosophy of consciousness but a theory of mental labor*.

The problems surrounding Marx's ideology concept are more displaced than solved by the recent explosion of interest in the notion of the fetish, one of the central terms of the first chapter of *Capital*.⁸⁵ Again, it is often argued that all ideas (conceived, for example, by adherents of the so-called *Krisis* group in Germany and their "Wertkritik," the "*Denkform*") are essentially mystificatory, i.e. fetishistic, in character because they mask and hence support the dominant relations of production. This, in turn, has lent further credibility to the thesis that people's false ideas are to blame for their situation. Nothing could be further from Marx's basic argument that only processes, relations, and activity can govern historical reality. Further, the notion of ordinary ideas as fetishistic-ideological threatens to unravel Marx's understanding of alienation. It is no

⁸⁴ Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: NLB, 1976), 52-3.

⁸⁵ One of the earliest attempts to deemphasize the supposedly positivistic tendencies of *The German Ideology* was John Mepham's argument that it is really *Capital* where Marx presents his theory of ideology. Mepham's creative and persuasive reading of Marx's analysis of wage, money, and commodity as phenomenal forms, resulting from, and underpinning, the opacity of reality under capitalism, can be viewed as a prototype of the argument that Marx's concept of ideology was essentially a sort of structuralist-functional account of systemically produced distortion or what is sometimes referred to as "*Verblendungszusammenhang*" (context of blindness). See John Mepham, "The Theory of Ideology in *Capital*," in *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, vol. 3 (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1979), 141-74.

longer a purely material process, such as is the limitation of the individual's practice and the reification of social products, like the commodity, the wage, and money; rather, alienation becomes perceived in a Feuerbachian sense. This approach is exemplified by a passage in Eagleton's book. In this passage, Eagleton says,

In certain social conditions [...] human powers, products and processes escape from the control of human subjects and come to assume an apparently autonomous existence. Estranged in this way from their agents, such phenomena then come to exert an imperious power over them, so that men and women submit to what are in fact products of their own activity as though they are an alien force.⁸⁶

This (Young Hegelian) critique amounts to a critique of religion, and the critique of religion is "the premise of all criticism," according to Marx's well-known, but rather Bauerian, opening sentence of the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction*.⁸⁷ However, the critique of religion is precisely what Marx and Engels problematize as ideological in *The German Ideology*. It is certainly worthwhile to pursue the question of how philosophy *qua* mental labor, like exchange value, becomes a "social hieroglyphic" as it obscures and erases its origins in the social field. However, abstract thought, in my reading of the "work of the break," is not a "real abstraction" in the same way that the commodity is one: It is a product of labor and hides its conditions of production, but it is not an object that enters into relationship with other objects in the sphere of exchange.

The German Ideology is, quite in line with Marx's other works, an explicit rejection of the thesis that ideal mystification, as opposed to real abstraction, plays an important role in the lives of the laboring masses and history at large.⁸⁷ Many who have

⁸⁶ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 70.

⁸⁷ As far as the mature Marx is concerned, it is true that some of Marx's statements give credibility to the idea that mass delusion is responsible for the constant reproduction of the capitalist machinery. In the first part of *Capital*, just to pick one example, Marx says:

taken “ideology” to mean “mystification” in the sense of a lack of a common understanding of the workings of class society have been particularly prone to attributing something to Marx that he expressly disavowed. Mystification was an important social category for the Young Hegelians but not for Marx. (This holds true specifically for the pre-*Capital/Grundrisse* texts after 1845.) To the extent that people have false or inadequate ideas about the mechanisms of capitalism, these ideas are not what matters; what matters is what people do. It can thus be said that Marx’s project in *The German Ideology* is not a project of demystification. It is, to be sure, a critique of the mystifying abstractions of Hegelian philosophy, whereas *Capital* is a critique of the mystifying abstractions of classical political economy. But Marx’s intention, exemplified in his ideology concept, was not to enlighten the benighted masses but to provide an accurate account of the material basis of history, which, of course, is precisely what *Capital* did. Insofar as Marx was indeed criticizing false ideas, it makes sense to rephrase Eagleton’s assertion that *The German Ideology* is about what “blinds men and women to the harsh actuality of their social conditions”⁸⁸ and say that *The German Ideology* is an inquiry into what blinds philosophers to historical actuality of material practice.

It is not enough that the conditions of labour are concentrated in a mass, in the shape of capital, at the one pole of society, while at the other are grouped masses of men who have nothing to sell but their labour-power. Neither is it enough that they are compelled to sell it voluntarily. The advance of capitalist production develops a working class, which by education, tradition, habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident law of nature. The organization of the capitalist process of production, once it is fully developed, breaks down all resistance.

This seems to suggest that the workers’ false view of the dominant mode of production as natural contributes to its very dominance. However, it becomes obvious in the sentences that follow this passage that it is first and foremost “[t]he dull compulsion of economic relations [that] completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist” (Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, MEGA 2, Part II, Vol. 9 [Berlin, Dietz Verlag: 1990], 693-40). In other words, the working class conceives of capitalism as inescapable because of capital’s power to make escape impossible – only until, however, its own laws lead to its destruction. It should also be noted that the working class may think of the “grotesquely terrible laws” (ibid.) of capitalist accumulation as natural but may still revolt against them just as the individual wage laborer may think that her employer is greedy by nature but must still be prevented from ruthless exploitation. This is to say that common misperceptions are systemic, but they are not determining. This, I argue, is a valid assertion for Marx’s post-break work both before and after *Capital*.

⁸⁸ Eagleton, *An Introduction*, 77.

By a highly ironic twist of events, Marxist ideology theory has, in the course of its development, turned almost into the opposite of what it once was. As early as 1930, in a review of Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, Max Horkheimer described this process. There, he states that the concept of ideology was increasingly "assigned a task which runs counter to the theory from which it arose."⁸⁹ By that, he meant that, under the influence of hermeneutics and vitalist philosophy, ideology theory had become a kind of worldview sociology, a study of systems of thought. This new focus on ideas, however vaguely conceived as a product of social relations, has shifted the critical gaze away from philosophy as a form of limited practice and toward the analysis of popular consciousness. One can see the echoes of this approach in the frequent admonitions of many contemporary theorists of all persuasions that Marx underestimated the role of interpretation. Eagleton, for example, holds that due to this "blindspot," "it is hard to see . . . how ideology can be in any sense an active social force, organizing the experience of human subjects."⁹⁰ Thought is not theorized here as exclusively mental labor but as a universal human capacity. Marx, it is said, wanted to disregard ideas and their effectivity completely.⁹¹ The paradox, it is further claimed, is that ideas matter greatly not only to the subjects of history but to any kind of emancipatory project, in the form of a vision of change perhaps; and finally, Marx's theories, after all, were just ideas, too.⁹² It is difficult

⁸⁹ Max Horkheimer, "A new concept of ideology?" in *Knowledge and Politics: The sociology of knowledge dispute*, ed. Volker Meja and Nico Stehr (London: Routledge, 1990), 144.

⁹⁰ Eagleton, *An Introduction*, 77.

⁹¹ To consider another example, one need only return to Raymond Williams who has maintained that Marx and Engels's determinism was "simplistic" and has "in repetition been disastrous" (*Marxism and Literature*, 59). The problem, as described by Williams, is that Marx and Engels's decision to disregard "men as narrated" is based not only on a "naïve dualism" but, more importantly, on an "objectivist fantasy." The degradation of the ideational aspects of culture in *The German Ideology* compromises, according to Williams's harsh judgment, the effectiveness of the authors' arguments and signifies "a temporary surrender to the cynicism of 'practical men' and, even more, to the abstract empiricism of a version of 'natural science'" (ibid. 60).

⁹² So Eagleton asks, for instance, how Marx and Engels could have made the mistake of forgetting that "what counts for them as real is by no means innocent of theoretical assumptions" (*An Introduction*, 76).

to defend Marx on this account without becoming vulnerable to the charge of being “vulgar.” In reality, however, it would seem that precisely this new emphasis on ideas is in fact a retreat to pre-Marxian, philosophical modes of thinking. Perry Anderson sees this as a peculiar development of the twentieth century when he says, “The most striking single trait of Western Marxism as a common tradition is thus perhaps the constant presence and influence on it of successive types of European idealism.”⁹³

As I have indicated, *The German Ideology* is often maligned for not presenting a coherent theory of ideology.⁹⁴ This is an unjust charge. Eagleton is closer to the truth than he realizes when he wonders whether “this model of ideology [idealist thinking] can be generalized as a paradigm of all false consciousness.”⁹⁵ In fact, ideology *is* a model or paradigm of idealist thinking. Idealist thinking is false consciousness, and false consciousness is the product of exclusively mental labor. Ideology, as Marx and Engels quite coherently argue, was merely the latest exemplar of idealist philosophy. There is nothing fundamentally amiss in their polemical use of a term that was typically applied to the French critical philosophy that had named itself “ideology” to connect it to the German critical philosophy that deemed itself far superior. Both, according to Marx and Engels, failed to go ground their critique of metaphysics in a critique of the *material* conditions of society.

If the ideology concept is said to be fraught with contradiction, there is at least one contradiction that has been accepted as real. Eagleton, for example, knows that “[f]or the Marx of *The German Ideology*, all thought is socially determined, but ideology is thought which *denies* this determination,”⁹⁶ and so do others. John B. Thompson, for

⁹³ Anderson, *Considerations*, 56.

⁹⁴ See, for instance, Eagleton, *An Introduction*, 83-4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

example, states in one of his two works on the concept of ideology: “[I]deology, on this account, is a theoretical doctrine and activity which erroneously regards ideas as autonomous and efficacious and which fails to grasp the real conditions and characteristics of social-historical life.”⁹⁷ However, this is typically not seen as a problem afflicting philosophy or idealist theory; rather, it is a delusion attributed to society as a whole. Thompson, for example, goes on to put together his own theory of ideology, which is in many ways a product of crossing cultural studies with functionalist sociology and Marxist critical analysis. Defining ideology as those forms of representation that legitimize relations of inequality, or “*meaning in the service of power*,”⁹⁸ Thompson argues that the study of ideology should be “concerned with whether, to what extent and how . . . symbolic forms serve to establish and sustain relations of domination in the social contexts within which they are produced, transmitted and received.”⁹⁹ This approach, for all intents and purposes, is based to a large degree on the Gramscian-Althusserian legacy of viewing the superstructure as composed of hegemonic forces that work to “interpellate” subjects and assure their “consent.”

Like Thompson, many writers who have contributed to this discussion have devised a more general concept of ideology, unburdened by the restrictions imposed by the idealism problematic. Unlike Thompson, some writers maintain that they have extrapolated this view from a study of Marx’s writings. Joe McCarney, for instance, has identified ideology with politics and asserted that “the tendency of his [Marx’s] thought is towards making utility in the class struggle the necessary and sufficient condition for

⁹⁷ John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 34-5. See also Thompson’s *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁹⁸ Eagleton, *An Introduction*, 7.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

consciousness to be ideological,”¹⁰⁰ that is, toward viewing ideological forms as a “medium of the class struggle in the realm of ideas.”¹⁰¹ Interestingly, McCarney is well aware that Marx never used the term “ideology” to refer to proletarian revolutionary consciousness, but this does not prevent him from dismissing Marx’s class concept of consciousness and his critique of mental labor out of hand. Thus, he says, “Hence, one has to be careful not to read too much theoretical significance into the major examples of bourgeois ideology . . . [and that one must not be] over-impressed with the Young-Hegelian case . . . [and be led to assume] that all ideology . . . necessarily has an abstract, idealist character.”¹⁰² Of course, this interpretation rests squarely on Lukács’s concept of class consciousness, and Lukács, as we know, had rested his theoretical innovations on Lenin’s political priorities, which were very different from those of Marx and Engels.

Even more intriguing in this respect is Stuart Hall’s persistent engagement with the problem of ideology. In many ways, he has articulated the so-called “broad” approach to the concept¹⁰³ better than anyone else. Following the general trend in cultural and social theory, Hall has deemphasized the opposition between science and ideology, has argued that we must see ideologies as not merely located at a highly theoretical level, and has maintained that there are no direct causal links between ideology and class interests.

¹⁰⁰ Joe McCarney, *The Real World of Ideology*, Harvester Philosophy Now (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), 8.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰² Ibid., 14. This statement is all the more surprising given McCarney’s declared goal to “concentrate . . . on the explicit references to ideology and the ideological to be found in Marx’s work . . . [based on the assumption that] where he [Marx] wishes to use the concept he will generally be prepared to do so under its own name” (ibid., 1).

¹⁰³ Just to give one example for the “broad” approach to ideology, which is pervasive in the human sciences, is that formulated by André Béteille in essay *Ideologies and Intellectuals* (Oxford and Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980):

An ideology is that set of ideas and beliefs which seeks to articulate the basic values of a group of people—what they cherish for themselves and for others—to the distribution of power in society. An ideology is not a systematic theory, although it has systematic properties and it often strives to be a theory. An ideology may or may not succeed in articulating basic values to the distribution of power, but such articulation is part of its purpose and design. (8)

Thus, Hall has defined ideology as “the mental frameworks—the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.”¹⁰⁴ It is not difficult to discern that this is essentially an attempt to read Gramsci into Marx,¹⁰⁵ and this argument has been made succinctly and successfully by Jorge Larraín, who has also written extensively on the subject. However, even Larraín, protesting, *pace* Hall, that Marx’s notion of ideology was negative or critical, not positive or discursive¹⁰⁶, fails to recognize that no matter how much we “narrow” the concept of ideology to, say, only those representations that legitimize, naturalize, or otherwise sanction the *status quo* as symbolic apologia of the existing relations of production, we are bound to miss the point of Marx’s *Ideologiekritik* if we reject as unimportant the fact that Marx always directed this critique at the professional thinker, at thought as a function of labor in a class society.

Hall, however, was in fact cognizant of the risk inherent in inverting the debate over ideology (from material practice to ideal meaning). In a little-known paper, written in 1977 and titled “The Hinterland of Science: Ideology and the Sociology of Knowledge’,” Hall once aptly described this form of theoretico-political slippage:

Whatever else it signals, the concept *ideology* makes a direct reference to the role of *ideas*. It also entails the proposition that ideas are not self-sufficient, that their roots lie elsewhere, that something central about ideas will be revealed if we can discover the nature of the determinacy which *non*-ideas exert over ideas. The study of ‘ideology’ thus also holds out the promise of a critique of *idealism*, as a way of explaining how ideas arise. However, the difficulty is that, once the study

¹⁰⁴ Stuart Hall, “The Problem of Ideology—Marxism without Guarantees,” in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 27.

¹⁰⁵ See also Ariane Fischer Pasternak, “Stuart Hall and the Concept of Ideology: A Critical Assessment,” *International Journal of the Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2005): 33-8.

¹⁰⁶ See Jorge Larraín, “Stuart Hall and the Marxist Concept of Ideology,” in *ibid.*, 47-70.

of ideas is placed at the centre of an investigation, an immense theoretical labour is required to prevent such a study *drifting*, willy-nilly, into idealism.¹⁰⁷

As my analysis of Part I of *The German Ideology* will show, this is precisely the accusation that Marx and Engels leveled against Feuerbach and Stirner. Because both Feuerbach and Stirner were both so preoccupied with wanting to reduce consciousness to its truthful origin in the materiality of the concretely sensuous human will and to restore supposedly free-floating ideas to their rightful creators and owners, they accorded too much importance to those “spooks” of the imagination, credulously believing that liberation consists in the act of becoming self-conscious. However, according to Marx and Engels, it is not enough to become aware that people are the only subjects of history and that there are no super-human, independent authorities or essences confronting or guiding us; what is needed for social change is precisely human subjects who are engaged in the making of revolutionary history.

In another passage in the same essay, Hall elaborates on the problem of materialist theory sliding into idealism. He states, “It is difficult to know precisely why it is that this Kantian legacy, in its manifold permutations, has continued so persistently to haunt the theory of ideology. One reading suggests simply that *idealism*, in one form or another, constitutes the dominant bourgeois philosophical tradition; and materialism is constantly in danger of collapsing back into it.”¹⁰⁸ That this “danger” affects Marxist theory too is confirmed by Eagleton, who also acknowledges that “Marxist intellectuals trade in ideas, and so are always chronically likely to overrate their importance in society as a whole.”¹⁰⁹ Ironically, of course, both Stuart Hall and Terry Eagleton have fallen

¹⁰⁷ Stuart Hall, “The Hinterland of Science: Ideology and the ‘Sociology of Knowledge’,” in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *On Ideology*, London 1978, p. 10-1.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁹ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 36.

victim to the very tendency they pinpointed so accurately: that a materialist philosophy of ideas, as long as it remains just that, is always at risk of being overwhelmed by idealist prejudices. But even though this penetrating insight has, on occasion, forced itself into Marxist theory, it has rarely commanded any amount of sustained attention, nor has it been grounded in a radical critique of intellectual labor of the kind that Marx and Engels offered in 1845/46.

CHAPTER 1

The Critique of Metaphysics: From the Science of Ideas in France to Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit in Germany

Reason is the fundamental category of philosophical thought . . . [Central to philosophy is] the conviction that what exists is not immediately and already rational but must rather be brought to reason. . . . In its structure the world is considered accessible to reason, dependent on it, and dominated by it. *But through this first thesis that made philosophy into rationalism and idealism it became critical philosophy as well.* As the given world was bound up with rational thought and, indeed, ontologically dependent on it, all that contradicted reason or was not rational was posited as something that had to be overcome. Reason was established as a critical tribunal. In the philosophy of the bourgeois era reason took on the form of rational subjectivity. Man, the individual, was to examine and judge everything given by means of the power of his knowledge. Thus the concept of reasons contains the concept of freedom as well. (Herbert Marcuse)¹¹⁰

Interpretation and Intentionality

Marx, as is well-known, did not coin the term “ideology.” When Marx and Engels employed the term in *The German Ideology*, it had already been in use for a few decades. Judging from the casual manner with which Marx and Engels use the word “ideology” in the text, we can assume that they believed the meaning of the word to be relatively obvious.¹¹¹ This meaning, dominant in the 1840's in Germany, was essentially that which had developed in France in the conflict between the sensualist philosopher Antoine-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836) and Napoleon Bonaparte. Tracy had

¹¹⁰ Herbert Marcuse, “Philosophy and Critical Theory,” in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 135-136.

¹¹¹ See Dierse, “Ideologie,” 146.

introduced his “ideology” on April 21, 1796 during a presentation to the *Institut National*, declaring it to be the name of his new “*science des idées*.” Napoleon, who had initially been a member of the *Institut* and a friend of Tracy and his followers, turned against his former allies after his *coup d’état* in late 1799 or Eighteenth Brumaire.¹¹² In the process, “ideology” changed its connotative quality. While the referent remained the same – the group of “ideologists” around Tracy – the meaning of the concept was inverted as Napoleon accused Tracy’s anti-metaphysical philosophy of being a “nebulous” and “sinister metaphysics.”¹¹³ Having come into conflict with the ideologists’ efforts to secularize and liberalize education, Napoleon denounced reason, science, and social progress in order to assert instead his knowledge of the “heart” and “history,” by which he had religion and tradition in mind – both instrumental in shoring up Napoleon’s conservative regime, specifically his 1801 Concordat with the Pope and his self-coronation as Emperor of France.

In his attempt to discredit the ideologists, Napoleon opposed theory and practice, attacking the former as empty intellectualism and hailing the latter as the only valid reality. It is this meaning that became dominant in the early eighteenth century and eventually suppressed Tracy’s original concept. This development is described in the literature as a “reversal.” If ideology had become the target of ridicule and reproof from reactionary circles, Marx and Engels took an entirely different approach, attacking ideology from a radical stance. This important difference is often glossed over in the literature. Superficially, Marx’s *Ideologiekritik* resembles Napoleon’s assault on Tracy, but their intentions and implications had nothing in common. To wit, in criticizing

¹¹² One of the first accounts of the Tracy-Napoleon moment, see Jay W. Stein, “Beginnings of ‘Ideology’,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* LV (April 1956), 2: 163-70.

¹¹³ Cited in *ibid.*, 137.

ideology, Napoleon condemned the very idea of revolutionary intervention while Marx saw a distinct lack of a sense for revolutionary intervention in his opponents. But if their assessment of the ideologists was profoundly dissimilar, Napoleon and Marx were in fact speaking of the same thing: the post-1789 anti-metaphysical bourgeois atheism that carried Enlightenment perfectionism, optimism, utopianism, and political liberalism into the nineteenth century. This meaning of the word “ideology” was firmly established in Germany when Marx and Engels picked it up and used it in their critique of German philosophy, which, in Marx and Engels’s eyes, was even more “ideological” than the French *idéologie* because it had no real basis in a Revolution but merely constituted a compensation for the lack thereof.

It is also known that Marx was familiar not only with Napoleon’s attack on the ideologists¹¹⁴ but also with Tracy’s work on economics. Specifically, Marx had read and studied volumes 4 and 5 of *Éléments*.¹¹⁵ Because the word “ideology” had not significantly altered its meaning between 1796 and 1845, it is easy to see that Marx and Engels were referring directly to contemporary philosophy. As I have suggested in the introduction, this meaning is far more specific than contemporary interpretations,

¹¹⁴ In *The Holy Family*, for instance, Marx comments on Napoleon’s “Terror” against bourgeois society. He says, “His scorn of industrial *hommes d’affaires* was the complement to his scorn of *ideologists*” (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *MECW* 4 [New York: International Publishers; Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1975], 123).

¹¹⁵ A brief note on Tracy’s works is in order here. Among his major writings are two pamphlets, one of which was his response to a prize-essay contest (on the question of “What are the means of constituting a morality among a people?”) and which first appeared in 1798. The other one was a review of the recently published *L’Origine de Tous les Cultes* by Dupuis (1795); it first appeared in 1799. Tracy’s most important work is the multi-part *Éléments d’idéologie* (*Éléments*, for short). Intended as a textbook for the *écoles centrales*, the first three volumes of the first part (*Projet d’élémens d’idéologie*, *Grammaire*, and *Logique*) appeared in 1801, 1803, and 1805 respectively. The other two parts planned by Tracy were never completed, except for two manuscripts for part 2, one of which was a critique of Montesquieu titled *Commentaire sur l’Esprit des Lois* (translated by Thomas Jefferson and published anonymously as *A Commentary and Review of Montesquieu’s Spirit of Laws* in 1811). The other manuscript appeared twice: once in 1815 as *Elémens d’idéologie, IV partie, Traité de la Volonté* and once in 1817 as a *Treatise on Political Economy* (also translated by Jefferson). The whole series was reprinted in 1817-18, 1824-5, and 1826-27.

according to which “[i]deologies, for Marx . . . are the false (‘upside down’) ideas which the ‘material interaction’ of people inspires in them, as an inevitable process.”¹¹⁶

Similarly extrapolative is the claim that “[a]ccording to Marx and Engels an ideology is a systematic attempt to demonstrate the rationality of the existing distribution of wealth and the social utility of the order in which the wealthy hold positions of power . . . [that i]t is invariably an apology for institutionalised inequality”¹¹⁷ and the suggestion that “‘ideology’ signified ‘various forms of social consciousness’”¹¹⁸ for Marx. Political scientist Walter Carlsnaes has aptly expressed the direct connection between the French *idéologie* and Marx’s critique of the German ideology: “Marx did not pick the word at random or out of the blue; rather, he used it as a foil for attacking precisely that which the word was originally meant to say.”¹¹⁹ Carlsnaes explains further that

Marx specifically appropriated the word “ideology” and its derivatives . . . because he was fundamentally opposed to the whole philosophical stance taken by the idéologues (and their followers, amongst whom Comte was included) that he proceeded with a *critique* of “ideology,” which, however, in the process came to stand for something more than simply the notions associated with this group.¹²⁰

This “more,” of course, was the idealism inherent in any philosophy that restricted itself to a study of ideas, no matter how materialist in intention.

If it is true that Marx’s ideology concept has frequently been misconstrued in the literature, it is also true that several Marxist and non-Marxist scholars have indeed noted the specific meaning of the term in Marx’s works. Bhikhu Parekh, for instance, states

¹¹⁶ Raymond Boudon, *The Analysis of Ideology*, 17.

¹¹⁷ D. J. Manning (ed.), *The Form of Ideology: Investigations into the Sense of Ideological Reasoning with a View to Giving an Account of its Place in Political Life*. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980), 3.

¹¹⁸ “Preface” in MECW 5, XX. This orthodox interpretation has been reinforced by the sociological and anthropological equation of ‘ideology’ and ‘forms of symbolic representation.’ Stuart Hall has argued that this extended “meaning *is* in fact sanctioned by his work” (Hall, “The Problem of Ideology—Marxism without Guarantees,” 27.)

¹¹⁹ Walter Calsnaes, *The Concept of Ideology and Political Analysis: A Critical Examination of Its Usage by Marx, Lenin, and Mannheim* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 23-4.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

very simply, “In the *German Ideology* Marx continued his attack on the idealism of Hegel and the Young Hegelians with the significant difference that he now called them ideologists rather than idealists, and their systems of thought ideology rather than idealism. . . . [He] uses the terms interchangeably.”¹²¹ Somewhat less firmly, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi states that “[i]n *The German Ideology*, ‘ideology’ still meant chiefly a philosophical superstructure of idealistic type.”¹²² And yet, the complete isomorphism between ideology and idealist philosophy in the early Marx is often elided in favor of a search for a more general formula. Thus, David McLellan begins by asserting the link between Marx’s critique of ideology and his materialist approach to history but ends up obscuring the problem of philosophy. First, he says, “But not all ideas were ideology and Marx did not wish simply to produce a more dynamic version of Tracy’s science of ideas.”¹²³ However, he goes on to say,

It was their connection with this class struggle and its social and economic basis that gave certain ideas their ideological force. Society was in fact riven by conflicts of interest, but in order for it not to fall apart these oppositions were covered up by ideas which represented attempts to portray society as cohesive rather than conflictual by justifying the asymmetrical distribution of social and economic power. . . . What made ideas ideological, therefore, was that they concealed the real nature of social and economic relationship and thus served to justify the unequal distribution of social and economic resources in society. It followed that not all ideas were ideological but only those which served to conceal social contradictions. Hence, while all classes, including the working class, could produce ideology, it was only ideology in so far as it served to further the interest of the ruling class. And since society and its class structure was constantly changing the same ideas could begin or cease to be ideological.¹²⁴

It seems there is resistance to accept the notion that Marx’s concept of ideology had very little to do with later concepts of ideology, say, that of Lenin¹²⁵, and was really not an early form of some *bona fide* Marxist concept of ideology. The tendency to see in

¹²¹ Parekh, *Marx’s Theory of Ideology*, 1.

¹²² Rossi-Landi, *Marxism and Ideology*, *Marxism and Ideology*, trans. by Roger Griffin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 29.

¹²³ David McLellan, *Ideology*, 11.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁵ See my introduction.

The German Ideology an underdeveloped version of a historically later understanding is likely an instance of what Quentin Skinner has called the “mythology of doctrines,”¹²⁶ by which he meant the postulation of an ideal type of a *Begriff* (term or concept) and the subsequent investigation of supposed forerunners, deviations, and more or less close approximations on this *Begriff* in the works of different authors. Skinner has pointed out that “[t]he particular danger with this approach is that the doctrine to be investigated so readily becomes hypostatized into an entity”¹²⁷ and that this entity is conceived as a “growing organism.” As a result, it seems as though “ideas get up and do battle on their own behalf,” and the theorist, apparently unaware of this idealist presumptions, sets out to find the origins, or “anticipations,” of an idea in “the classics” and, when he or she does not succeed in finding them, feels justified in accusing the writers under scrutiny of having failed to discuss the idea.¹²⁸ This critique applies to ideology theory as well; too often, contemporary notions of ideology are read into *The German Ideology*, which, it is then claimed, presents only a vague first outline of the theory of ideology and is inconsistent on the issue. The mature Marx, on the other hand, is credited with having produced a much more accurate understanding of ideology but reprimanded for using the term only very sporadically and unsystematically. One example from this “pack of tricks we play on the dead,”¹²⁹ is McLellan’s remark, not at all atypical, that Marx’s “comments on ideology tend to be *obiter dicta* and he never produced a coherent account.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. by James Tully (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 34.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 35-6.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹³⁰ McLellan, *Ideology*, 9. Skinner also discusses this problem with respect to Marx scholarship (e.g. 40, 42, etc.)

This is why it is crucial to return to the question of the *intention* of the authors under discussion. With regard to Marx and Engels, we must ask, in Skinner's words, "the question of whether any of these writers ever intended, or even could have intended, to do what they are thus castigated for not having done."¹³¹ If Marx and Engels did not in fact wish to produce a systematic exposition of what now tends to go under the name of the dominant ideology theory, then what did they intend to do? In order to avoid the reification of doctrines in our study of the ideology concept and to understand the intentions behind the Marxian ideology concept, it is prudent to approach Marx's writings in terms of their specific historical context. As I have shown, it was not by chance that Marx employed the name of the latest anti-religious French philosophy in his argument against the philosophical critique of religion in Germany. Moreover, the rationale for Marx's identification of these two intellectual developments was not purely negative, as was Napoleon's vilification of Tracy. The unfortunate effect of the fixation on Marx's *reversal* of the original positive evaluation of ideology was the neglect of the *connection* between Tracy's project of "ideo-logy" and Marx's critique of idealism. It is my claim that this connection needs to be explored if the purpose of the ideology concept in *The German Ideology* is to emerge.

The Abstract Materialism of Destutt de Tracy

Tracy's career is one intricately connected with historical events. As a colonel in the military, Tracy joined the Moulins Assembly in 1788 under Louis XVI and then became one of three representatives for the Bourbonnais nobility in the Estates-General. After the

¹³¹ Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 38.

King had given orders for the three estates to join in the National Assembly – in response to the so-called “Tennis Court oath” – Tracy was among the liberal supporters from the first and second estate to unite with the *tiers*. As a deputy in the National Assembly, he argued for the abolition of special privileges as well as for the abolition of slavery. Subsequently, he became a member of various liberal, republican, constitutionalist clubs like the *Société de 1789* and the *Amis de la Constitution*. After a brief return to military service under Lafayette, Tracy moved to Auteuil, where he joined the salon culture around Mm. Helvétius. There, he was able to engage in conversations with his future friends and fellow ideologists like Cabanis. In the course of the Jacobin hunt for supposed royalists, Tracy was arrested in November of 1793. Robespierre was overthrown just days before Tracy’s scheduled execution; however, he was not released from prison for another three months (in October of 1794). In 1796, he was elected as an associate in the *Institut National*, where he presented his ideological theories in a number of papers and pamphlets. Early in 1799, he was nominated to be part of the Council of Public Instruction as an assessor of the curriculum in the so-called *écoles centrales*, a system of secondary schools that had been created along with the *Institut*, and that was already teaching on the basis of Tracy’s *idéologie*. Having been appointed to Napoleon’s Senate, along with a number of other *idéologues*, in December of 1799, his and his friends’ influence became severely limited, mostly because of the Consule’s authoritarian and conservative rule. After the removal of Napoleon, in which Tracy may have had a hand as the one who produced the initial resolution (drawn up by Lambrechts), and Napoleon’s Hundred Days, Tracy entered the *chambre des pairs* of Louis XVIII, a Senate-like body of aristocrats, military men, and ecclesiastics.

Given Tracy's aristocratic background and bourgeois politics, it may seem counterintuitive to posit a link between Tracy and Marx. However, the exploration of such a link between the French materialists of the turn of the century and Marx and Engels's exit from the disputes between the Young Hegelians is not to collapse the distinction between the bourgeois and communist modes of materialist thought but only to say that Marx developed his radical approach to the study of society and history out of a larger intellectual current that had arrived on the European scene, first primarily in England and France, with the rise of capitalism. This intellectual current can be summarily described as the *secularization of philosophy*. This secularization of philosophy, which took the form of a sweeping critique of traditional metaphysics, was itself a product of the industrialization and the advance of capitalism in Europe.¹³² The secularization movement among philosophers entailed a wide-ranging turn away from abstract *a priori* concepts, which were based largely on religious precepts, and concerted efforts to ground intellectual practice in empirical reality – to conceive a worldly science of the human. The scientific method, naturalism, realism, empiricism, positivism, and Darwinism can all be viewed as products of this “worlding” of philosophy.¹³³

¹³² This secularization of the real relations is captured in Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (“Manifesto of the Communist Party”) in this famous passage:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors,’ and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment.’ It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value. (Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*, 475)

¹³³ The interest among nineteenth-century socialist thinkers in the history of (Ancient and Renaissance/Enlightenment) materialism and the scientific revolution was itself an effect of this development. See, for example, Friedrich Albert Lange's two-part work *The History of Materialism* (Perspectives in Social Inquiry: Classics, Staples, and Precursors in Sociology [New York: Arno Press, 1974]). This work, originally published in 1866, which conspicuously excludes any mention of Marx's historical materialism, save in one minor footnote, has remained a standard textbook on materialism into the twentieth century.

While highly dissimilar in terms of perspective and politics, these theoretical developments all represented attempts at displacing speculative concerns with the transcendent with a more immediately relevant understanding of the factual, the actual, and the here and now. Historical materialism was also one such development. Thus, Marx's singular contribution to critical philosophy did not emerge from within a vacuum but rather from within a larger intellectual and social development. If an examination of preceding and contending theories in no way diminishes Marx's intervention, so is there no need for the recognition of Marx and Engels's ingenious exposure of post-Hegelian philosophy as traditional idealism in materialist garb to entail a disregard of the fact the "ideologists" in France and Germany were important figures in the drive toward a worldly philosophy.

However, materialist thought was never a monolithic body of principles. Secularization did not bring about the end of idealist philosophy. This, in fact, is the point of *The German Ideology*: to demonstrate that there are abstract materialisms every bit as metaphysical as traditional Idealism. As we shall see, Tracy's theories actually had more in common with the seventeenth and eighteenth century debates between rationalists and empiricists than with Marxian social theory. Tracy's theories were primarily epistemological and methodological while Marx's theories were primarily historical and critical-practical. The economic theories of Tracy were steeped in bourgeois dreams about private property, individualism, and the state, whereas the economic theories of Marx were based on the concept of contradiction in relation to problems like labor and class. In contrast to Tracy's philosophical materialism, Marx's dialectical materialism was far more radical. So what can an inquiry into the philosophy of Tracy do to help us

understand Marx? In a sentence, we can answer this question by saying that Marx's implicit connection between *idéologie* and German critical philosophy points to the fact that the opposition to the study of ideas as transcendent entities was not an isolated incident that pitted Marx against the Young Hegelians but a broad theoretical movement that brought forth increasingly sophisticated materialist approaches to the study of society and culminated in Marx's turn to political economy.

While the literature on Tracy and his *idéologie* is sparse,¹³⁴ he has become a standard point of reference in the history of ideology theory.¹³⁵ Even so, ideology theorists' treatment of Tracy has been rather cursory, for his place in the development of the ideology concept has been viewed as little more than a curious oddity. A detailed discussion of Tracy is also outside the scope of the present work, but by elucidating the anti-speculative character of his thought, I hope to make sense of the critique of idealism as a defining aspect of key formations in modern critical philosophy. This will help us see the debate between Marx and the Young Hegelians not as an isolated esoteric dispute but rather as an aspect of a larger problematic. This is not to relativize Marx's intervention but only to demonstrate that the ideas of the transitional Marx came out of post-

¹³⁴ As I have previously mentioned, only two English-speaking commentators, Emmett Kennedy and Brian Head, have published book-length studies of Tracy's life and works. Cheryl B. Welch's *Liberty and Utility: The French Idéologues and the Transformation of Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) contains a chapter on Tracy. In other languages, there is a small body of literature on the ideologists as a group, such as the work of Italian scholar Sergio Moravia; see *Il pensiero degli idéologues: scienza e filosofia in Francia (1780-1815)* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1974). Finally, in French, there is the classic study of François Picavet; see *Les idéologues; essai sur l'histoire des idées et des théories scientifiques, philosophiques, religieuses, etc. en France depuis 1789* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1891).

Brian Head attributes the lack of interest in Tracy, among other things, to intellectual and political prerogatives. In his dissertation, Head aptly summarizes the seemingly contradictory accusations leveled against the *idéologues* when he says, "Idéologie was variously charged either with responsibility for the persecutions and turmoil of the Revolutionary period, or simply with a shallow and naïve optimism which stemmed from its intellectual abstractionism and esprit de système" (*Political Theory and Political Philosophy*, 5).

¹³⁵ For a more elaborate discussion of Tracy's role in the history of the ideology concept, see Emmett Kennedy's "'Ideology' from Destutt de Tracy to Marx" (*Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, vol. 3 [Jul.-Sept. 1979]: 353-368. One of the essays Kennedy draws on is the 1956 article by Jay W. Stein, titled "Beginnings of 'Ideology'," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 55, No. 2 (April 1956): 163-170.

Enlightenment materialism and that Hegel must not be assumed to have been the ultimate horizon, against which Marxian concepts emerged. Finally, an inquiry into Tracy's approach to the problem of metaphysics will substantiate the reading of Marx's concept of ideology as relating directly to philosophical idealism. The original connection between ideology and speculative thinking was eventually eclipsed by developments that catapulted the ideology concept onto a rather different trajectory, but this does not nullify its significance, especially not for Marx scholarship.

Marx's ideology critique was a radicalization of the Young Hegelian project to overcome the eschatological idealism of traditional philosophy born from its close ties to revealed religion. Tracy's *idéologie* was aimed at establishing the principles of human understanding through a rejection of the belief in *a priori* ideas, which had characterized Christian theology and religious philosophy. German Left Hegelianism and French sensationism, as different as they were, shared a commitment to "natural" life, i.e. this-worldly – as opposed to super-natural or other-worldly – existence. Moreover, the Young Hegelians' radicalization of Hegel's critique of Kant and of Hegel's accommodationist stance toward Christianity was not unlike the *idéologues*' anti-religious rejection of innate ideas in favor of human experience and observation. Politically, both philosophical orientations were decidedly liberal in their advocacy of progressive policy-making. The critique of the Church, its doctrines, and its support of authoritarian regimes was intricately tied to the critique of philosophical metaphysics, and both were essential to the French and the German attempts to develop the basic principles of a human science. Hence, Tracy's ideology and Marx's ideology critique were not diametrically opposed to

each other, as is implied in the notion of a “reversal,” but related by way of their interest in creating a materialist approach to society.

The sensationism developed by Tracy was in many ways simply an extension and application of French Enlightenment materialist thought as encapsulated by major figures like as Julien Offray de La Mettrie, Marquis de Condorcet, Claude Adrien Helvétius, the Encyclopédistes – including Jean le Rond d’Alembert, Denis Diderot, and Baron d’Holbach, and in particular Étienne Bonnot de Condillac.¹³⁶ Some of his colleagues were Dominique Joseph Garat, Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis, Comte de Volney, as well as Pierre Louis Ginguiné, Charles Joseph Mathieu Lambrechts, Abbé Henri Grégoire, Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, Pierre Claude François Daunou, and Jean Baptiste Say. For the most part, they were a group of ex-aristocrats and ecclesiastics turned liberal republicans in support of the middle class. Several of them met regularly at Madame Helvétius’s *salon* in Auteuil, a wealthy part of Paris, where Tracy lived. They also worked together as professors and associates at the *Institut National*, a scholarly institution founded in 1792 for the purpose of integrating the French schools and of linking the systematic acquisition and transmission of knowledge to politics.¹³⁷ In the words of one commentator, the ideologists “expected to supervise the direct application of their philosophy in the fields of legislation and government.”¹³⁸ In their effort to put social science at the service of the post-Revolutionary reforms and specifically to renovate the educational and cultural system in France, the so-called “Class of Moral and Political Sciences” made recourse to

¹³⁶ Of course, Tracy’s relation to these philosophers is more complex than is suggested here. Tracy did not merely accept their approach but developed it. For example, while many of the empiricists, with whom Tracy associated himself, retained a sense of the independence of reflection (supplementing sense impressions), Tracy asserted that ideas were nothing but forms of experience, that is, they were completely reducible to a physiological faculty.

¹³⁷ The Institute was later replaced by Napoleon’s Imperial University.

¹³⁸ Stein, “Beginnings of ‘Ideology’,” 167.

the empiricist doctrines of the *philosophes*. This department of the *Institut* contained Tracy's section, which bore the name "Analysis of sensations and ideas," employed the *philosophes'* mechanistic models of human nature and their visions of social perfectibility.

What attracted the *idéologues* to the eighteenth-century *savants* was not only the latter's determination to found a kind of Newtonian science of society but also their virulent anti-clericalism, for the *idéologues'* secularism pivoted on a deep suspicion, and outright dismissal, of religion.¹³⁹ The positing of an independent consciousness before or outside of human experience was not a valid notion for Tracy, and neither were Descartes' mind-matter (thought-extension) dualism or his assumption of primordial ideas. At the same time, Tracy viewed the Cartesian observational and mathematical method as central to his own philosophy. Going further than Locke by reducing all knowledge to sense perception, Tracy suggested that the correct dictum should be: "I sense, therefore I am"¹⁴⁰ and argued that only effects, and not causes – especially not "first causes" – should and could be the object of a human science. The problem with all hitherto existing philosophy was that it had traditionally framed its inquiries in terms of unknowables and was therefore ill equipped to distinguish belief from certain truth. Because of its reliance on religious questions, metaphysics had to be overcome, along with the residues of scholasticism and all forms of speculation, in favor of a theoretical system, the basis of which was to be a science of ideas, or "ideo-logy."

Tracy was much impressed with the Enlightenment critique of religion. Drawing on Charles François Dupuit's argument that Christianity was only a cult based on the

¹³⁹ With respect to the Bible, for instance, Tracy agreed that Jesus Christ was not a historical but a mythical figure, an abstraction. Later, this argument was famously put forth in Germany by Young Hegelian David Strauß.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Head, *Ideology and Social Science*, 27.

worship of nature, Tracy charged that all religion was a “supposition without proof” and “a powerful force for making men follow certain rules of conduct (based on) an illegitimate authority; hence . . . all religion may be defined as an obstacle to good logic and to sound morality both private and public.” The political implications of these atheist assertions were in line with bourgeois revolutionary ways of thinking, as was Tracy’s denunciation of the reliance of “oppressive governments” on “priests.” More firmly than Hegel, Tracy denounced the power of the Church and maintained that Christian dogma was an inadequate and primitive anachronism:

Theology is the philosophy of the infancy of the world, (but) it is time that it gave way to the philosophy of its age of reason; theology is the work of the imagination, like the bad physics or poor metaphysics which are born with it in times of ignorance and serve as its base; whereas the other philosophy is founded on observation and experience, and is closely tied to true physics and rational logic, which are all the products of the work of enlightened century; finally, a theologian is nothing but a bad philosopher who is rash enough to dogmatise on things he does not and cannot know.¹⁴¹

Tracy’s neologism “ideology” designated what he felt was *la théorie des théories* or *la prima philosophia*. His reasoning was that a science of ideas was essentially the knowledge of knowledge, and because knowledge or ideas were the most fundamental aspect of being human, understanding their constitution was the first and most critical task of philosophy. As the reader may appreciate, there are certain parallels between this notion and Hegel’s conception of philosophy as the realization of Spirit’s progressive self-comprehension. It is precisely this equation of being human and consciousness that was to become the target of Marx and Engels’s critique when they argued that consciousness is only the fifth of “historical acts.”¹⁴² Tracy scholar Brian Head stops

¹⁴¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴² According to Marx and Engels, the first historical act is the production of the means to satisfy original needs; the second act is the production of new needs; and the third act is procreation. These acts are said to be “aspects” rather than stages. The fourth “moment” is cooperation, industry, and exchange. And “[o]nly now, after having considered four moments, four aspects of primary historical relations, do we find that

short of employing a Marxian perspective to read Tracy, but he makes an interesting observation about Tracy's notion of ideational existence as "our whole being."¹⁴³ Commenting on the role of this notion in Tracy's thought as a whole and finding a contradiction in the ideological philosophy, Head notes, "This doctrine of the primacy of ideas-as-experience is rather anomalous in what is otherwise a philosophy of monist materialism. The doctrine plays little role in Tracy's overall conception of *idéologie* and the human sciences, but it does suggest the overwhelming residual influence of the Cartesian *cogito* in French philosophy."¹⁴⁴ Head downplays the idealism inherent in Tracy's sensationism; however, he emphasizes the materialist intention behind the ideologist's attempt to define mental operations as physical processes, rather than as expressions of sovereign powers.

The idea of the unity of the sciences was central to Tracy's system. In his *Treatise on Political Economy*, which was to be the second part of his work on the "elements of ideology" and which was translated by Thomas Jefferson, Tracy expresses this idea clearly as he outlines his project in the "Advertisement" preceding the text. He says,

At the end of my logic I have traced the plan of the elements of ideology, such as I conceived they ought to be, to give a complete knowledge of our intellectual faculties, and to deduce from that knowledge the first principles of all the other branches of our knowledge, which can never be founded on any other solid base. It has been seen that I divide these elements into three sections. The first is properly the history of *our means of knowledge*, or of what is commonly called our understanding. The second is the application of this study to *that of our will and its effects*, and it completes the history of our faculties. The third is the application of this knowledge of our faculties to the study of those beings which are not ourselves, that is to say of all the beings which surround us. If the second section is an introduction to the moral and political sciences, the third is that to the

man also possesses 'consciousness'" (CW 5, 43).

¹⁴³ Quoted in Head, *Ideology and Social Science*, 34. See also *ibid*, 37.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

physical and mathematical; and both, preceded by a scrupulous examination into the nature of our certitude and the causes of our errors, appear to me to form a respectable whole, and to compose what we ought really to call the *first philosophy*.¹⁴⁵

The notion of the principal identity of the sciences of the human and the sciences of nature was yet another key aspect of Tracy's philosophy. Tracy referred to his ideology as a part of "zoology." While he qualified this position by arguing that certain human phenomena could not be measured, and, especially later, expressed his reservations about a social mathematics, Tracy was convinced that there were no essential differences between the science of natural laws and the science of society. In this respect, Tracy can be seen to stand opposite to Hegel, who had explicitly attacked the belief in the nature – human equation (while understanding both the natural and the human as part of Spirit in the process of externalization). Interestingly enough, however, Tracy's reasoning was not based on the idea that society follows laws just as physical existence does; rather, he maintained that there is no knowledge outside of our sensations and that therefore all (objective) knowledge is that of sensing subjects. As dissimilar as their respective philosophical positions were, Hegel and Tracy can be seen to have met not only in their rejection of a "transcendental" consciousness but also in their insistence that there are no forever inaccessible "things-in-themselves" and that, inasmuch as human understanding was in principle limitless, all reality could be known. However, in contrast to Hegel, who held fast to the idea of universal *reason*, Tracy, in keeping with the British empiricism that had inspired Condillac, believed that the unity of perception was a result of habit.

¹⁴⁵ Dorsey, ix, x.

(Despite this emphasis on habit, however, Tracy was not a relativist because he held that the *structure* of the mind was universal.¹⁴⁶)

Even though Tracy did not theorize the historical and active aspect of reality, the concept of social change was central to his philosophy. Based on the notion of culture as shaped by custom, his theories served Tracy's liberal politics, which revolved around education as the key to the transformation of society in accordance with rational principles. But Tracy thought of change in a thoroughly philosophical manner. The idealism inherent in the proposition that transformation is brought about not by revolutionary practice but by a small elite teaching the people how to think correctly is obvious.¹⁴⁷ The problem with this "materialist doctrine" is, as Marx later puts it in his third "Thesis on Feuerbach," that, while this doctrine asserts "that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, [it] forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated."¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, the notion that education could be achieved by way of perfect communication, a language free of error and distortion, was mired in what Marx would characterize as the ideological myth that formal changes in the way people think and speak affect reality in a substantive way.

In his capacity as politician and administrator¹⁴⁹, Tracy was committed to the mission of civilizational progress and determined to eradicate prejudice and falsehoods

¹⁴⁶ Head points out that Tracy distinguished between the "structure" and the "content" of the mind, the former of which he assumed to be biological and universal and to guarantee the unity of perception. The latter, according to Tracy, is variable.

¹⁴⁷ David Hawkes says in his little book *Ideology* that "[i]t seemed to these men that the grip of systematic illusion could only be weakened through a Baconian re-education of the people, which would be conducted on an empirical basis" (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁴⁸ *CW* 5, 7.

¹⁴⁹

from the civic consciousness by instituting proper educational reforms. This makes plain the idealist assumptions that compromised Tracy's radical materialist approach. Aside from the fact that sensualist philosophy was profoundly adialectical, its basic pedagogical impulse was deeply rooted in the fantasy that in order for social advancement to take place, people needed to have their minds set right. Eagleton describes the tension in Tracy's idealist materialism accurately when he explains,

An ideologist . . . was initially a philosopher intent on revealing the material basis of our thought. The last thing he believed was that ideas were mysterious things in themselves, quite independent of external conditioning. "Ideology" was an attempt to put ideas back in their place, as the products of certain mental and physiological laws. But to carry through this project meant lavishing a good deal of attention on the realm of human consciousness; and it is then understandable, if ironic, that such theorists should be taken to believe that ideas were all there was. . . . [However,] the early French ideologues *did* believe that ideas were at the root of social life, so that to accuse them of inflating the importance of human consciousness is not simply a mistake; but if they were idealists in this sense, they were materialists in their view of where ideas actually derived from.¹⁵⁰

Tied to his strong sense that education was the key to social transformation was Tracy's scientism. Lkening the emergence of *idéologie* from the metaphysics of Leibniz and Berkeley to the development of astrology into astronomy and alchemy into chemistry, Tracy subscribed to a staunch positivism. For all its reliance on a mechanistic understanding of the human world as quantifiable and subject to universal laws, positivism too has since revealed its metaphysical fallacies, especially because it assumes an Archimedean point from which the scientist (or ideologist in this case) is believed to view the totality of reality. Both notions are idealistic: the idea that a knowledge elite must teach correct ideas to people *and* the idea that correct knowledge is based on neutral scientific description (rather than political action).

¹⁵⁰ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 63-4.

However, when evaluating the accomplishments and failures of a theory, we must bear in mind what forces the theory had to struggle against. In our case, it is important to remember that, far from being hegemonic, Tracy's philosophy was caught up in a battle against the reactionary forces in post-Revolutionary France. Convicted by Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety as a "false revolutionary" and a traitor, Tracy soon became persecuted by Napoleon for his supposed ties to the "Reign of Terror." From the standpoint of the Eighteenth Brumaire, Tracy was now viewed as an incorrigible radical. Having narrowly escaped the guillotine¹⁵¹, Tracy had to defend his ideology against the counter-revolution, the autocratic regime of Napoleon Bonaparte, who was actively encouraging a religious revival in France with his series of Concordats. Almost immediately after his *coup d'état* against the Directory in 1799, Napoleon entered into hostile relations with the members of the Institute, who had initially supported his *putsch*, removing them from office (namely from his Senate and Tribune) and denouncing their theories. With his ideology maligned in public, Tracy saw his materialist doctrines impugned and charged with the same faults, of which he had tried to purge philosophy. In an attempt to consolidate his power as First Consul, Napoleon sought to deprive the *idéologues* of their political power and launched an all-out attack on them. Tracy's project never really recovered from the turning political tide. After the restoration of the monarchy in France, Tracy disengaged himself from governmental affairs, and while he maintained a *salon* in Auteuil and kept up active correspondence with a number of supporters and followers, the fate of his *idéologie* was bound up with the fate of the Enlightenment, which became progressively submerged with the rise of Romanticism and

¹⁵¹ Kennedy claims that Tracy's life was spared by two days (*A Philosopher in the Age of Revolution*, 37), after having spent nearly a year in prison. Many of his acquaintances had already died on the guillotine; Condillac had died in prison; and the chemist Lavoisier, greatly admired by Tracy, had been executed in May 1794.

Neo-Kantianism. Traditionalism became prominent once again as philosophers like theocrats Louis Gabriel Ambroise de Bonald, Pierre Simon Balanche, Hughes Felicité Robert Lammenais, Joseph Marie Comte de Maistre, and François René Chateaubriand, who promoted a Catholic revival in France, were able to consolidate their power.

Marx's own intervention stands out all the more against this background. The notion that the ignorant masses had to be ruled by a knowledge class who alone knew how to manage society according to a supposed general interest was folly for Marx, who had just developed a complex critique of the modern state in his *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*. It is not difficult to imagine what Marx would have said about Tracy's political views had he dealt with them more extensively than he did. Given Tracy's bourgeois approach to constitutionalism and representative government,¹⁵² he was clearly worlds apart from Marx's understanding of the state as a superstructural extension of class rule. However, Marx likely would have acknowledged that Tracy's philosophy was true to reality in France where the bourgeoisie really had wrested power from the aristocracy and really had transformed society in the interest of all, at least initially; Bauer's pretensions of an educated minority leading a benighted majority into a new historical age, on the other hand, were simply illusory and without material basis. Just as the category of the "general" was left uninterrogated by Tracy, so was the category of the "particular." Tracy's definition of the individual as a bundle of sensations, produced by what he considered the original twin-phenomena of movement and resistance, was distinctly philosophical in contrast to the Marxian concept of the individual as a social and historical being. (Incidentally, the Engels of the *Dialectics of*

¹⁵² Having turned from a champion of a constitutional monarchy into a republican, Tracy still argued for property (and gender) restrictions to the right to vote.

Nature does make recourse to a sensationist understanding of the individual, but the differences between the two approaches cannot be pursued here. Stirner also maintained that the individual is nothing but a sensuous and willing island of corporeal being. This will be explored in the last chapters.)

Even though there is only one brief discussion of Tracy in *The German Ideology*, these remarks, as well as comments about Tracy in *Capital* and other places, indicate clearly what Marx's opinion was of his economic theories. For Marx, Tracy's agreement with the conservative argument that social inequality and poverty were not systemic but accidental (and were problematic only insofar as they allegedly contributed to a degeneration of [bourgeois *Schein*]morality), and that they could be remedied by way of economic liberalism and philanthropy, were a typical example of a ruling class fantasy. After all, Tracy was not inclined to challenge the old idea of natural inequality (due to individual "talent" and "merit") or to grasp the way it functions as a rationalization of class privilege. Moreover, Tracy formulated a critique of the leisure class as unproductive while insisting – like many other anti-communist radicals including Stirner – that even the propertyless were never without property because they owned not only their labor but their individuality as well. If inequality seemed unfair, then, equality was worse because it hampers economic growth and leads to a state of misery for all. With regard to existing social antagonisms, those were to be reconciled through an awareness of a common interest in prosperity, individual ownership, and consumption. Thus, he states in the summary of Chapter VIII of his *Treatise on Political Economy*, "Property and inequality are insuperable conditions of our nature... It is an error in some writers to have pretended there were *non-proprietors*. Divided by many particular interests, we are all re-united by

those of *proprietors* and *consumers*.” Further, in the summary to Chapter X, he concludes that “consequently, there are not in society classes which are constantly enemies to one another.”¹⁵³

Tracy’s unwavering belief in the sanctity of private property, a clear manifestation of his class position, becomes particularly apparent in the passage from his *Traité de la volonté* (translated by Jefferson as *Treatise on Political Economy*), which Marx and Engels used to attack Stirner’s identification of property and individuality. Marx and Engels’s critique of Tracy deserves to be reproduced at length here. In their discussion of “the oldest and most trivial bourgeois objections,” Marx and Engels quote Max Stirner who argued that the socialists, in their assault on private property, do not take into account ““that its continuance is safeguarded by the peculiarities of human beings.”” In response to Stirner’s claim that having an opinion is having property, Marx and Engels refer to Tracy and his effort to link together *propriété*, *individualité*, and *personnalité*. Quoting Tracy as saying that ““nature has endowed man with an inevitable and inalienable property, property in the form of his own individuality’,”¹⁵⁴ Marx and Engels offer this critique:

Having thus made private property and personality identical, Destutt de Tracy with a play on the words *propriété* and *proper*, like “Stirner” with his play on the words *Mein* and *Meinung*, *Eigentum* and *Eigenheit*, arrives at the following conclusion:

‘It is, therefore, quite futile to argue about whether it would not be better for each of us to have nothing of our own... in any case it is equivalent to asking whether it would not be desirable for us to be quite different from what we are, and even to examining whether it would not be better for us not to exist at all.’

[. . .]

When the narrow-minded bourgeois says to the communists: by abolishing property, i.e., my own existence as a capitalist, as a landed proprietor, as a factory-owner, and your existence as workers, you abolish my individuality and

¹⁵³ Dorsey, xxii, xxiii.

¹⁵⁴ *MECW*, 228.

your own; by making it impossible for me to exploit you, the workers, to rake in my profit, interest or rent, you make it impossible for me to exist as an individual. – When, therefore, the bourgeois tells the communists: by abolishing my existence *as a bourgeois*, you abolish my existence *as an individual*; when thus he identifies himself as a bourgeois with himself as an individual, one must, at least, recognise his frankness and shamelessness. For the bourgeois it is actually the case, he believes himself to be an individual only insofar as he is a bourgeois.

But when the theoreticians of the bourgeoisie come forward and give a logical justification for this equation, then this nonsense begins to become solemn and holy.¹⁵⁵

The upshot of Marx and Engels's assessment is here that Tracy's materialism, while motivated by a liberal-progressive critique of religion and mystification, was deeply invested in bourgeois modes of thinking.

The meaning of "radical" has thus to be established from one context to another. What was radical about the perspective of the emerging bourgeoisie was not radical from the perspective of the proletariat. Tracy was not a communist; he was a theorist of the French Revolution, and his ideas never went beyond the principles of Republicanism and representative government. At the same time, Tracy's secularism was, unlike Napoleon's farcical regime, a revolutionary response to the economic revolution that was the introduction of the capitalist mode of production to Western Europe. The French Revolution, of course, had an enormous impact on Western Europe, and hence also on German intellectuals, including Hegel, who retained close relations with French liberals like Victor Cousin, and to whom Heinrich Heine humorously referred as the 'Orléans of German Philosophy.' Hegel esteemed Kant as the theoretical counter-part of the Revolution: the Young Hegelians, however, did not confine their enthusiasm for democratic change to the ivory tower but became politically active, often in open opposition to the regime. Especially Arnold Ruge, Moses Hess, Mikhail Bakunin, Marx,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 229.

and Engels looked to French socialism and communism, rather than to philosophy, for inspiration.

Other Young Hegelians – namely those emerging from the critique of Christianity – were less inclined to view economic class as the principal *Schauplatz* where the historical contradictions were played out. Instead, they understood reality as an ideal essence. In this respect, then, they were closer to Hegel than the socially oriented Young Hegelians. Those thinkers, from Marx and Engels’s standpoint, were obsolete and irrelevant. As different as the theories of Strauß, Bauer, and Feuerbach were from the empiricist and sensualist traditions of the French Enlightenment, they shared with them a continued concern with consciousness. That is, neither tradition has a sense of practical activity. As Marx put it in the famous first “Thesis on Feuerbach,” materialism had developed the “objective” side of reality and idealism the “subjective” side of reality, but neither had conceived of “real sensuous activity.”¹⁵⁶ Hegel was unable to go beyond abstractions of practical activity just as Tracy was unable to go beyond abstractions of sensuousness. It is this connection that Marx picked up on when he likened the Young Hegelians, both in the more strictly idealist mode (Bauer) and in the more strictly materialist mode (Feuerbach), to post-Enlightenment French *idéologie*.

While the ideas of Bauer and Feuerbach had a direct and powerful impact on Marx’s development as a thinker, Tracy and his *idéologie* did not play a particular role in the formation of Marx’s thought. Hegel is generally considered the singular most decisive and most pervasive philosophical influence in the work of Marx, and his thought can be said to have contributed more to the “new” materialism or “historical materialism” than the “old” materialism of the naturalists and empiricists. Nonetheless, in considering what

¹⁵⁶ *CW* 5, 3.

Marx was doing, one must not disregard those contextual relations that Marx was either not conscious of or was deliberately obfuscating, namely the relation between materialist thinkers of different intellectual traditions. It was only in the heated struggle with other liberal and leftist secularist thinkers and leaders that Marx was able to formulate his own theory of society. For whatever reason, Marx often chose not to highlight his agreements with those from whom he wished to distinguish himself and with whom he disagreed on crucial points, and these polemical considerations must figure into our analysis of the meaning of Marx's words. Most notably, in the context of *The German Ideology*, Marx never acknowledged his debt to Stirner. Matters were different with Feuerbach, whom Marx continued to regard highly even after he announced his departure from Feuerbach's ideas. Ultimately, Tracy was an important part of philosophy's historical turn away from religion and towards atheism, which resonated with thinkers like Feuerbach who in turn inspired Marx's turn towards a theory of practice.

The Secular Idealism of Hegel

Despite the central importance of Hegel in Marx's thought, he is rarely considered part of the story of "ideology."¹⁵⁷ Ostensibly, this is because Hegel, just like the Young Hegelians after him, did not use the term.¹⁵⁸ Curiously enough, ideology theory has not

¹⁵⁷ One exception is perhaps non-Marxist John Plamenatz who, however, has presented Hegel and Marx as precursors of Mannheim, asserting that the former are "the two thinkers to whom above all we owe the concept of ideology as we use it today" (*Ideology* [New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970], 45). While quite problematic in its assimilation of dialectical idealism and the Marxian theory of real relations into the sociology of knowledge, Plamenatz's argument that "[t]hrough Hegel says nothing of 'social existence' determining 'consciousness' and does not speak of 'ideology', the idea of the view or image of the world, the *Weltanschauung*, takes a large place in his philosophy" (ibid., 43) can be recommended for its emphasis on Hegel's anti-transcendentalist (anti-*a priori*) approach to consciousness.

¹⁵⁸ It seems that there are only two passages in Hegel's works that refer to French *idéologie*, both of them in Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Werke 20 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 219 and 286.

had any trouble debating the role of theorists such as Foucault in the transformation of the ideology concept. The assumption here is that a writer does not have to use a particular term in order to have an impact on how that term is conceptualized by other writers. However, it is presumptuous to then claim that this particular author made a “contribution” to the development of the concept in the sense of a deliberate attempt at defining the concept in question. Foucault explicitly rejected the concept of ideology and hence can, in fact, be said to have intended to intervene in the discourse of ideology theory, but he cannot be considered integral to the trajectory he abandoned and declared defective. What, then, are we to make of Hegel’s role in the formation of Marx’s ideology concept, given the absence of the term in Hegel’s work?

It should be added, however, Quentin Skinner makes the equally valid point that the history of ideas is always based to a large extent on the fetishization of words and concepts. In order to avoid such fetishization, we must recognize that “the persistence of such expressions tells us nothing reliable at all about the persistence of the questions which the expressions may have been used to answer.”¹⁵⁹ Similarly, I argue, we must recognize that the absence of an expression in someone’s writings tells us nothing reliable about the history of the questions which have evoked the expression in other writers. Thus, we need to determine the meaning of an idea by looking at how it functioned in relation to an author’s intentions; to her or his general and more immediate intellectual background, particular rhetorical situation, and theoretical concerns; and to the target audience of a text. It is here that Hegel matters centrally in an analysis of Marx’s ideology concept, for it is he who figures as a “backstage” point of reference in Marx and Engels’s critique of the Young Hegelians. In other words, Hegel cannot

¹⁵⁹ Skinner, *Meaning and Context*, 56.

meaningfully be said to have been an ideology theorist; nonetheless, he can be shown to have shaped Marx's ideology theory.

Incorporating Hegel into our understanding of Marx's ideology concept, however, does not by any means imply a reintegration of Marx into traditional philosophy, or a "Hegelianization" of Marx, anymore than a recognition of the Tracy-Marx connection requires viewing Marx as an *idéologue*, nor does it necessitate a reading of Hegel as a proto-Marxist, or a "Marxization" of Hegel. Rather, this effort involves a mapping of the philosophical and political currents that helped to produce *The German Ideology*. In other words, it is impossible to conceive of the "message" of *The German Ideology* or any other written work as detached from the discursive "conditions of its possibility." Marx and Engels were writing in conversation with other thinkers, in response to other, contemporary and earlier theories, and on the basis of a particular body of thought that they had studied before they wrote *The German Ideology*. Moreover, Hegel, as is well-known, had a lasting impact on a generation of revolutionary thinkers, including the Young Hegelians and Marx. His presence in and behind the text, therefore, is not surprising. What must be explained is how Hegel's philosophy, just like Tracy's philosophy from a very different direction, inadvertently opened the door for the *Ideologiekritik* that implicated Hegel and his students retroactively.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) was a contemporary of Tracy, but while both were post-Enlightenment thinkers, Hegel's ideas emerged from a very different tradition, that of German Idealism.¹⁶⁰ However, like Tracy and others who

¹⁶⁰ There is a vast body of scholarship on Hegel; I shall mention here only a few works of interest. First, a set of analytical perspectives on Hegel's concepts of praxis, work, and activity are contained in Lawrence S. Stepelevich and David Lamb (eds.), *Hegel's Philosophy of Action* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press), 1-18. A well-crafted and lucid account of *The Phenomenology* is offered by Terry Pinkard in his *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Pinkard argues that *The Phenomenology* is a theory of knowledge and that knowledge or self-consciousness, for

refused to give in to Romanticism, Hegel had an interest in bridging the gap between human knowledge or the thinking subject and the world of experience or known reality. At the same time, Hegel's criticism of Kant, just like that of his materialist opponents, began and ended with (self)-consciousness.¹⁶¹ If Tracy was concerned to develop a science of consciousness, one of Hegel's most important projects was to produce a philosophy of the progress of (the appearances of) consciousness, or a *Phenomenology of Spirit*¹⁶². Hegel defined this *Geist* (also translated as "Mind") as follows: "But essence that is *in* and *for itself*, and which is at the same time actual as consciousness and aware of itself, this is *Spirit*."¹⁶³ However, unlike Tracy's philosophy, Hegel's philosophy was premised upon idealist concepts, including the "Self," the "Absolute," and the "Idea," all

Hegel, is always social and historical, not transcendent: his concept of rationality is "material," not "formal" like Kant's theory of knowledge (130). A close reading of *The Phenomenology* is Quentin Lauer's *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993). This book is written as a summary interpretation and also contains a synopsis of the Preface. Finally, a defense of *The Phenomenology* as a coherent and internally unified work can be found in "The Architectonic of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit" by Jon Stewart (in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Dec., 1995): 747-776). The author claims to have found the "hidden structure" (751) of the text. The article is useful in particular for its survey of the literature on *The Phenomenology*.

¹⁶¹ Paul de Man has offered an interesting interpretation of Kant's "materialism." According to de Man, the concepts of the transcendental as "entirely intraconceptual" and of the metaphysical as implying an empirical moment "external to the concept" are linked in Kant: "Ideological [i.e. metaphysical/empirical] and critical [i.e. transcendental] thought are interdependent and any attempt to separate them collapses ideology into mere error and critical thought into idealism" (*Aesthetic Ideology*, Theory and History of Literature 65, ed. by Andrzej Warminski [Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996], 72).

¹⁶² For a short summary of the history of the *Phenomenology*, including some remarks on the title, and on the interpretation of the work, see Lorenz Bruno Puntel's epilogue to a standard German edition (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987), 573-595. This epilogue also contains a reproduction of the original *Selbstanzeige* (authorial promotion), in which Hegel states:

Dieser Band stellt das *werdenede Wissen* dar. . . . Sie betrachtet die *Vorbereitung* zur Wissenschaft aus einem Gesichtspunkte, wodurch sie eine neue, interessante, und die erste Wissenschaft der Philosophie ist. Sie faßt die verschiedenen *Gestalten des Geistes* als Stationen des Weges in sich, durch welchen er reines Wissen oder absoluter Geist wird. . . . Der dem ersten Blicke sich als Chaos darbietende Reichtum der Erscheinungen des Geistes ist in eine Wissenschaftliche Ordnung gebracht, welche sie nach ihrer Notwendigkeit darstellt, in der die Unvollkommenen sich auflösen und in höhere übergehen, welche ihre nächste Wahrheit sind. Die letzte Wahrheit finden sie zunächst in der Religion, und dann in der Wissenschaft, als dem Resultate des Ganzen. . . .

In der *Vorrede* erklärt sich der Verf. über das, was ihm Bedürfnis der Philosophie auf ihrem itzigen Standpunkte zu sein scheint; ferner über die Anmaßung und den Unfug der philosophischen Formeln, der gegenwärtig die Philosophie herabwürdigt, und über das, worauf es überhaupt bei ihr und ihrem Studium ankommt. (Ibid., 581-2)

¹⁶³ Hegel, G. W. F., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 263 (§ 438).

of which hinged on “thought” rather than experience; for Hegel, sensory experience was only the first form of consciousness, to be supplanted by understanding, reason, and eventually science/philosophy.

It is outside the scope of this chapter to discuss Hegel’s thought in detail. However, it is necessary to characterize this philosophy at least in its basic outlines in order for me to show what exactly Marx “stood on its feet.” For this purpose, I will take a brief look at the “Preface” of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is generally recognized as having been written as a summary not only of the book but of Hegel’s system as a whole.¹⁶⁴ *The Phenomonology* is considered foundational for the later works of Hegel and important here because it lays out his approach to history as a dialectical movement of consciousness, that is, a logical development of ideal moments in the unfolding of the Absolute Idea. As J. N Findley explains in his foreword to A. V. Miller’s translation of the text,

The life then of the conscious Spirit, whether in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or the later *Philosophy of Spirit*, is arguably only a series of phases in which one or other of the moments of the Notion is detached, as subjective, from the rest, which are thereby extruded into objectivity, and which are then again reintegrated with the moments remaining in the subject, again extruded and again reintegrated in an endlessly developing rhythm.¹⁶⁵

The subject, or the universal, and the object, or the particular, are bound up in a dynamic process, which leads to a final state of self-consciousness when the subjective Ego recognizes that the objective world is identical with itself.

At the outset of the “Preface,” Hegel sets his philosophy apart from those philosophies (such as that of Schlegel) that locate truth in immediate sense experience:

¹⁶⁴ A slightly different perspective is presented by Werner Marx who claims that “the Preface largely constitutes a supplement to the Introduction, and thus was not meant to be merely a preface to the system that follows” (*Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: A Commentary Based on the Preface and Introduction*, trans. by Peter Heath [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975], xii).

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, xii.

“[T]he true shape of truth is scientific—or, what is the same thing, . . . truth has only the Notion as the element of its existence.”¹⁶⁶ For Hegel, the reliance on intuition, feeling, and faith is primitive and a lowly form of Spirit: It provides “edification rather than insight. The ‘beautiful,’ the ‘holy,’ the ‘eternal,’ ‘religion,’ and ‘love’ are the bait required to arouse the desire to bite; not the Notion, but ecstasy, not the cold march of necessity in the thing itself but the ferment of enthusiasm.”¹⁶⁷ This “gaze to the stars . . . heaven . . . an otherworldly presence,” however, has been replaced by a “sense . . . so fast rooted in earthly things,” resulting in the impoverishment of the Spirit.¹⁶⁸ But Spirit cannot be satisfied with an “indeterminate enjoyment of this indeterminate divinity . . . [,] rapturous haziness . . . [,] empty breadth . . . [and] depth . . . [,] an intensity without content . . . [, and] superficiality.”¹⁶⁹ Science is the seed of a “new world.”¹⁷⁰

However, Hegel is also skeptical of scientific logic. Scientific attention to detail, he claims, must not fall into a “monochromatic formalism” where one absolute is applied to all materials to leave only a “boring show of diversity” and to “palm off its Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black.”¹⁷¹ Hegel argues that in order to really grasp the True, science must comprehend it not merely as Substance but also as Subject, i.e. as a living and moving “mediation of its self-othering with itself.”¹⁷² Hegel emphasizes that the process of “doubling” or “bifurcation,” whereby opposition is produced and identity restored is a unity *achieved* (rather than immediate) in a work of becoming. This work, Hegel insists, must be understood as “the seriousness, the

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 4, § 6.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 5, § 7.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., § 8.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 5-6, § 9, 10.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 6-7, § 11-13.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 8-9, § 15, 16.

¹⁷² Ibid., 10, § 18.

suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative.”¹⁷³ Substance as Subject is driven by a circular teleology: the end is the goal of the whole, and the result is a return to the beginning—the only difference is that the “in itself” has become a “for itself.” This final term is Reason, and it is a subjective, a “*purposive activity*.”¹⁷⁴ It is brought about by science or knowledge. Again, “genuine knowledge”¹⁷⁵ is not sense-consciousness; it is the knowledge of knowledge: “The goal is Spirit’s insight into what knowing is.”¹⁷⁶ World-history is the time that Consciousness needs to come to itself, to realize that it is the Absolute.

Now, this whole course of development depends on “analysis” through thought: “[K]nowing is the activity of the *universal self*, the concern of *thinking*.”¹⁷⁷ What happens is that the thinking subject takes an idea and transforms it by first isolating it from the immediate unity, making it unfamiliar, and then putting it back. This “activity of dissolution is the power and work of the *Understanding*, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power.”¹⁷⁸ The essence of Spirit is the “tremendous power of the negative . . . the energy of thought.”¹⁷⁹ In this context, Hegel uses an expression which much later was to become the title of a book¹⁸⁰: “Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.”¹⁸¹ But consciousness opposes knowing and objectivity, and the movement between the two is the experience of Spirit.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 10, § 19.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 12, § 22.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 15, § 27.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 17, § 29.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 18, § 30.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 18, § 32.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 19, § 32.

¹⁸⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

¹⁸¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 19, § 32.

The phenomenology (of the false) is concluded when the True has realized itself as the “simple oneness of knowing.”¹⁸² At this point, the moments of Spirit become an organic whole in a movement which “is *Logic* or *speculative philosophy*.”¹⁸³ According to Hegel, phenomenology is then replaced with logic.

Philosophical truth, however, is radically different from the inferior mathematical truth. The latter is defective because the proof is external and accidental to the thing, and its results are self-evident. Moreover, its goal is poor and its object or referent lifeless: Focused merely on “magnitude,” “space and the numerical unit,” mathematical truth is hollow. According to Hegel, “Philosophy, however, has to do not with *unessential* determinations, but with a determination in so far as it is essential; its element and content is not the abstract or non-actual, but the *actual*, that which posits itself and is alive within itself.”¹⁸⁴ This, then, is Hegel’s critique of empiricism.¹⁸⁵ He argues that science *qua* philosophy must grasp that which *is* as something that is in a constant state of transformation, not as cold and unchanging facticity: “The evanescent itself must, on the contrary, be regarded as essential, not as something fixed, cut off from the True, and left lying who knows where outside it, any more than the True is to be regarded as something

¹⁸² Ibid., 22, §37.

¹⁸³ Ibid..

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 27, § 47.

¹⁸⁵ For an interesting discussion of Hegel’s relation to empiricism, see Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Criticism of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Houlgate locates one of the most anti-metaphysical moments in Hegel in the *Phenomenology* and specifically in his critique of the “unhappy consciousness,” which, unable to cope with the finite and the transient here and now, seeks consolation in an imaginary beyond (Houlgate, 96). Houlgate points out that Hegel’s rejection of positivism drew on the empiricist tradition of Bacon and Locke, whom Hegel praised for having produced arguments against abstract theorizing but with whom he disagreed on the grounding of concrete determinations: rather than trust sensual experience, Hegel insisted that conceptual thought alone can provide reliable knowledge of necessary determinations (105). Nonetheless, Houlgate maintains, quoting Hegel, that there is an essential parallel between speculative philosophy and empiricism, and it consists in the fact that “[n]o less than empiricism . . .--and in contrast to metaphysics—‘philosophy recognises only what is, having nothing to do with what merely *ought* to be and thus *is not there before us*’” (106).

on the other side, positive and dead.”¹⁸⁶ And yet, there is method to philosophical knowledge, as opposed to “the non-method of presentiment and inspiration.”¹⁸⁷

But not only empiricism and spiritualism are rejected, formalism is also denounced.¹⁸⁸ In Kant, for example, the “*triadic form*” was still unscientific because Kant used it only as an empty schematic or “table to terms.”¹⁸⁹ In an interesting passage, Hegel describes formalist (or, in non-Hegelian terms, abstract) thinking in terms that must have registered with Marx and must have informed his critique of Stirner:

[Only] the untutored mind may be filled with admiration and astonishment, and may venerate in it the profound work of genius. . . . The knack of this kind of wisdom is as quickly learned as it is easy to practise; once familiar, the repetition of it becomes as insufferable as the repetition of a conjuring trick already seen through. The instrument of this monotonous formalism is no more difficult to handle than a painter’s palette having only two colours, say red and green, the one for colouring the surface when a historical scene is wanted, the other for landscapes. It would be hard to decide which is greater in all this, the casual ease with which everything in heaven and on earth and under the earth is coated with this broth of colour, or the conceit regarding the excellence of this universal recipe: each supports the other.¹⁹⁰

Later, Marx would attack Stirner’s philosophy similarly as a “method of labeling,” which makes the universe appear like “a skeleton with scraps of paper stuck all over it.”¹⁹¹ What goes missing in formalist approaches is the “flesh and blood” of the “living ‘essence’” of reality: “A table of contents is all it offers, the content itself it does not offer at all.”¹⁹²

The contrast between the (formal) Understanding on the one hand and Science, or the self-development of the Notion, on the other hand is expressed by Hegel as follows:

“Instead of entering into the immanent content of the thing, it is forever surveying the

¹⁸⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 27, § 47.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 29, § 49.

¹⁸⁸ For a fairly recent discussion of these aspects of Hegel’s philosophy, see Herbert Schnädelbach his *Hegels praktische Philosophie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 2000), especially 28-36.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, § 50.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30-31, § 51.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 31, § 51.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 32, § 53.

whole and standing above the particular existence of which it is speaking, i.e. it does not see it at all. Scientific cognition, on the contrary, demands surrender to the life of the object, or, what amounts to the same thing, confronting and expressing its inner necessity.”¹⁹³ In other words, Science is characterized by an immersion into objectivity.

Speculative philosophy is one with being because everything that *is* is also its Notion. In Hegelian terms, the form is one with the content. In this respect, Hegel opposes speculative thinking to argumentative thinking, which, as he puts it, is purely negative and destroys without producing anything: Argumentation is a “dead end which does not lead to a new content beyond itself.”¹⁹⁴ In this context, Hegel provides a brief discussion of the subject-predicate inversion, which Feuerbach developed later on.

Predicates, according to Hegel, are primary in relation to subjects, but this is something that thinking has to realize by dispensing with the idea of the “solid ground . . . [of the] passive subject.” What Hegel says here is that while it would seem as though accidental properties accrue to stable subjects, the subject is not “the basis, as the *objective*, fixed self”; rather, it turns out that “the content is, in fact, no longer a Predicate of the Subject, but is the Substance, the essence and the Notion of what is under discussion. . . . The Subject has passed over into the Predicate.”¹⁹⁵ Feuerbach took this to mean that the predicates are the Subject and that, if these predicates are human, the Subject must be Man; there cannot be a Subject (God) prior to actual content.

The radical implications of Hegel’s ideas can be gleaned toward the end of the “Preface,” where Hegel returns to the critique of his Romantic opponents. He berates

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 36, § 59.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 37, § 60.

them for their “ignorance,”¹⁹⁶ their appeals to philosophizing “by the light of nature,”¹⁹⁷ and their “trivial truths.”¹⁹⁸ Subjective idealism, it seems, is for Hegel even less useful than a simple empiricism because it abnegates the very possibility of objective knowledge and disciplined inquiry. Only systematic and rigorous philosophy can penetrate beneath the surface of reality and comprehend human nature as an “achieved community.”¹⁹⁹ Hegel summarizes this view as follows:

True thoughts and scientific insight are only to be won through the labour of the Notion. Only the Notion can produce the universality of knowledge which is neither common vagueness nor the inadequacy of ordinary common sense, but a fully developed, perfected cognition; not the uncommon universality of a reason whose talents have been ruined by indolence and the conceit of genius, but a truth ripened to its properly matured form so as to be capable of being the property of all self-conscious Reason.”²⁰⁰

In this respect, Hegel would have agreed with Tracy. In *The German Ideology*, Marx was to retain the sense of the importance of a critical science but change the emphasis from the theoretical knowledge of history to the practical transformation of reality.

Along with French materialism, then, Hegel’s critique of formalist metaphysics and naturalist/supernaturalist philosophy were the backdrop against which Young Hegelian thought in general, and the Marxian critique of ideology in particular, formed. Jorge Larraín articulates this connection clearly when he says: “[T]he two strands of intellectual development in the eighteenth century which were the immediate antecedents of the concept of ideology . . . [were] French materialism and the German philosophy of consciousness.”²⁰¹ This connection holds *despite* the fact that Marx and Engels were just

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 42, § 68.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 42, § 68, 69.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 42 § 69.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 43 § 69. Hegel actually speaks of a “community of minds.”

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 43, § 70.

²⁰¹ Larraín, *Marxism and Ideology*, 6.

as interested as their opponents in “[t]he decomposition of the Hegelian system.”²⁰² While Marx and Engels had come to the realization that the “putrescence of the absolute spirit”²⁰³ was not as significant an event as they may themselves have previously thought, but they struggled with Hegel’s legacy as much as the other Left Hegelians did. At the same time, however, the entire radical spectrum of post-Hegelian philosophers saw themselves as building upon the revolutionary aspects of Hegel’s thought. If we want to understand the link between Hegel and Marx with respect to the critique of idealism, therefore, it is pertinent to consider *those* aspects in Hegel’s ideas, rather than the reactionary aspects which were picked up by the Right Hegelians and the conservative establishment.

The question about Hegel’s politics has remained an issue of controversy. There continues to be marked disagreement over whether Hegel was at heart a Christian apologist and conservative accommodationist, a philosopher of reconciliation, or a thinker of secular change, a philosopher of progress through conflict. One solution to this dilemma is that Hegel became increasingly moderate and even reactionary in his later years. Another way to approach the problem is to demonstrate that Hegel was neither radical nor traditionalist.²⁰⁴ Finally, there is Engels’s well-known argument that Hegel was in fact both simultaneously.²⁰⁵ For the present purposes, Engels’s treatment of Hegel is most relevant because, published in 1886, a full forty years after *The German Ideology*, it gives a persuasive account of Marx and Engels’s relation to German Idealism.

²⁰² *MECW* 5, 27.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁰⁴ See Karl Löwith who has claimed, for instance in his review of Marcuse’s *Reason and Revolution*, that “Hegel is neither reactionary nor revolutionary . . .” (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2, No. 4 [June 1942]: 562).

²⁰⁵ Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, *MECW* 26. New York: International Publishers, 1990.

Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy has been dismissed by some as simplistic, but I argue that the distinction between method (form) and system (content) in Hegel remains an intriguing one due to the fact that it helps explain the contradictions internal to Hegel's philosophy. In short, Engels proposes that, because Hegel did not view his own time as historical and hence temporary, his ideas lost their radical force and became accommodationist. Thus, Engels says,

Against it [dialectical philosophy] nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure against it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and passing away, of ascending without end from the lower to the higher. And dialectical philosophy itself is nothing more than the mere reflection of this process in the thinking brain. It has, however, also a conservative side: it recognises that definite stages of cognition and society are justified for their time and circumstances; but only so far. The conservatism of this outlook is relative; its revolutionary character is absolute—the only absolute dialectical philosophy admits. . . . [The problem is that Hegel conceives] . . . the end of history as follows: mankind arrives at the cognition of this selfsame absolute idea, and declares that this cognition of the absolute idea is attained in Hegelian philosophy. In this way, however, the whole dogmatic content of the Hegelian system is declared to be absolute truth, in contradiction to his dialectical method, which dissolves all that is dogmatic. Thus the revolutionary side is smothered beneath the overgrowth of the conservative side. . . . The inner necessities of the system are, therefore, of themselves sufficient to explain why a thoroughly revolutionary method of thinking produced an extremely tame political conclusion.”²⁰⁶

This “conservative side” expressed itself in various ways. As Engels points out, Hegel's conviction that the Prussian state represented the beginning of the end of history was based on a thoroughly undialectical conception of the *status quo* as the ultimate fulfillment of the dialectical movement of human existence. Similarly, Hegel's notion of the immanent *Weltgeist* was at once a profoundly this-worldly critique of the transcendent God and yet only one step removed from the theological postulate of an ulterior and finally revealed meaning, a higher cause. However, the “revolutionary side”

²⁰⁶ Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*., 360-361.

can be seen to have inspired not only Ludwig Feuerbach's influential critique of Hegel and then Max Stirner's critique of Feuerbach, but, partially through Feuerbach and Stirner, also Marx's critique of ideology. In many ways, Marx's rejection of the omnipotence of ideal abstractions was made possible by Hegel's rejection of an unknowable, irredeemably otherworldly essence. Inasmuch as Hegel's conception of the human world as the only world—as a historical world driven by contradictions—can be said to have outstripped the idealist myths contained in his thought, which are centered on Spirit as the protagonist of history, we can say that Hegel played an important part in the project of the conception of a critical, secular, and “scientific” philosophy.

As indicated earlier, the connection between Marx and Hegel is quite complicated. As one commentator put it, “One of the most difficult problems in the history of ideas . . . [is] the relationship between Hegel and Marx. . . . Few topics have been so frequently discussed, and from so many varying perspectives, with so little result.”²⁰⁷ Marxists and non-Marxists alike have expressed strong opinions on the issue of the Hegel/Marx nexus. Crudely put, philosophers hostile to the Marxist tradition have often tried to sever the connection between Hegel and Marx in an attempt to elevate Hegel to the status of a genius, whose only rival and equal in the history of German thought is argued to be Kant. In this account, Marx is often represented as a thinker of inferior intelligence and as having vulgarized and instrumentalized the ideas of the “great system-builder.”²⁰⁸ Non-Marxist philosophers who are sympathetic to some kind of socialist or utopian vision have been eager to make Marx into a “respectable” philosopher by demonstrating the parallels between the two men's thought and by arguing that Marx

²⁰⁷ Rick Roderick, *Habermas and the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1986), 440.

²⁰⁸ See, for instance, *Hegel: The Man, His Vision and Work* by Gustav E. Mueller (New York: Pageant Press, 1968).

not only borrowed from Hegel but developed his ideas further, refined them, clarified them, and demystified them; in the process, Marx is frequently sanitized and his critique of capitalism obscured.²⁰⁹ There are others who have insisted on the essential differences between Hegel and Marx simply because of a commitment to an individualist approach to intellectual history.²¹⁰ Marxist commentators have often stressed the discontinuity between Marx and Hegel, relying mostly on Marx's claim to have stood Hegel "right side up."²¹¹

By contrast, Western Marxism has significantly diminished the authority of the doctrine of the fundamental difference between Hegel and Marx, has produced a variety of Hegelian readings of Marx, and has helped shed more light on the radical impetus in Hegel's ideas.²¹² The work of Herbert Marcuse²¹³, for example, has shown that it is possible to draw attention to those elements of Hegel's thought that laid the groundwork for the origins of radical social theory – without distorting Hegel's philosophy or diluting Marx's critique of Hegel. Indeed, this work has helped to explain how Hegel was read by the generation of young thinkers in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, who had abandoned the position of the epigones and who were not willing to stay in the shadow of the "master."

Marcuse's and other nuanced accounts notwithstanding, there has been an effort to portray Hegel as a "Marx before Marx." This is a misrepresentation, which obscures

²⁰⁹ I am thinking here, for instance, of the work of David MacGregor, for example *The Communist Ideal in Hegel and Marx* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1984).

²¹⁰ Here we may name Karl Löwith's classic *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. by David E. Green (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1964).

²¹¹ See, for example, theorist of the Second International, Karl Kautsky, *The Materialist Conception of History*, ed. by John H. Kautsky and trans. by Raymond Meyer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

²¹² For a solid discussion of the neo-Hegelianism of the Frankfurt School, for example, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996 [1973]).

²¹³ See my discussion below.

the fact that Hegel displayed a consistently ambivalent stance regarding the practical implications of his philosophy and, especially during the last 15 years of his life, supported moderate and even conservative interpretations of his thought, stressing the teleological and even eschatological aspects of his system, declaring his philosophy a theodicy, and expressing his distaste for popular revolutionary movements. Moreover, Hegel advocated an aggressively rationalist philosophy that was in many ways irreconcilable with Romantic and Christian ideas about the world, but he also avoided the more confrontational conclusions of his own thought by emphasizing the importance of reconciliation between science and religion, mind and heart. As long as this is borne in mind and as long as a complex understanding of the nature of the contradictions in Hegel informs our investigation, the portrait of Hegel as a radical philosopher will not be skewed.

There is some agreement that at least part of the ambiguity²¹⁴ is the result of the fact that Hegel's intellectual politics fell into two periods: the period before the end of the 1790s and the period thereafter. While his first phase was characterized by a liberal orientation and an enthusiasm for the French Revolution,²¹⁵ the second phase was one of

²¹⁴ A good summary description of the deep tensions in Hegel, his tradition, and legacy, with respect to revolution/Revolution is offered by Stathis Kouvelakis who says in his *Philosophy and Revolution* (London: Verso, 2003) that

it hardly seems an exaggeration to say that German philosophy as such became the philosophy of the Revolution *par excellence*. . . . Yet, it would be hard to overemphasize the fact that this enthusiasm and this fidelity were inseparable from another face, German theory's fundamental *ambivalence* towards the revolutionary phenomenon, an ambivalence that the next generation, the *Vormärz* generation, repeatedly came up against: it may be regarded as constitutive of the whole problematic of the 'German road' toward political and social modernity. Accepted as a fundamental point of reference, even admired, the Revolution was nevertheless also the object of an ongoing denial. (9-10).

²¹⁵ Hegel's philosophy was distinctly non-nationalist, at least initially. It is well-known that Hegel was a supporter of the French Revolution and even applauded Napoleon's invasion, feeling admiration for the "extraordinary man" on the eve of the Battle at Jena in 1806. Hegel's disagreement with the patriotic, anti-French sentiments of Romantic thinkers like Schleiermacher set him apart from his fellow post-Kantians, and his celebration of Bonaparte's "liberation" of Germany, as well as his opposition to the populist and nationalist *Burschenschaften* movement, earned him distrust from their ranks. One critical point of divergence was the question of the role of the state. Whereas Schelling, for example, advocated a notion of the State as an instrument for the preservation and cultivation of a communal feeling, that of the *Volk*,

accommodation and support for official Prussian policy. The distinction between the young and the old Hegel has served as a template for understanding the Janus face of his absolute Idealism. What lends credence to the notion that his thought simply underwent a process of slippage is that particular practical circumstances may have brought about the conformist turn in Hegel's development. These circumstances – the anti-Hegelian backlash, the rise of a new Pietism, and the Reaction's clampdown on democratic movements and thinkers – certainly seem to have had an impact on the course of Hegel's relation to the State. Whatever the precise reasons for this change in his political orientation, it seems that, as early as 1818, following his acceptance of Fichte's chair in philosophy at the University of Berlin, Hegel retreated from the more explicitly oppositional stance of his early period. Concerned to appease the government, Hegel's pro-Prussia position became ever more pronounced, and his acquiescent stance *vis-à-vis* the Church informed his effort to impose uniformity on the Hegelian School and to squelch dissident voices among its ranks.²¹⁶

Then again, the problem with attributing Hegel's quietism solely to pragmatic considerations in his later life²¹⁷ is that certain elements in his thinking were consistently conservative. Foremost among these elements were Hegel's concept of the state and specifically his relation to the Prussian regime.²¹⁸ It is well-known that Hegel viewed the

Hegel dismissed such chauvinism as a pre-modern regression, emphasizing instead the necessity of external mediations of the world-spirit.

²¹⁶ Not only did Hegel generally sanction conservative interpretations of his thought, he also strove actively to enforce an accommodationist exegetical homogeneity among his school of disciples. See, for instance, Lawrence Stepelevich, *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, ed. and intr. by Stepelevich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 4.

²¹⁷ John Edwards Toews, for example, urges us in his classic study on Hegelianism to differentiate between Hegel's philosophy on the one hand and his personal accommodationist response to the changed political climate, a response which he attributes to Hegel's fear of persecution and isolation (*Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 96).

²¹⁸ Exemplary for the later Hegel's position vis-à-vis the Prussian State was an incident following the issue of the famous Carlsbad Decrees in 1819, when a number of progressive academics -- Christian de Wette, Ernst Moritz Arndt, and Jakob Friedrich Fries -- were fired from their academic posts because of their

State apparatus as the perfect expression of Reason in the world, the objective manifestation of morality and freedom. If, from the early twenties onward, Hegel became increasingly convinced that the reformed Prussian State was the self-consciousness of the *Weltgeist* having become actual, save perhaps some minor imperfections which would be rooted out in time, it is also true that Hegel's political outlook was always based to a significant extent on notions about authority, order, and hierarchy. It seems clear that, in Hegel's view, the grand finale of the struggles of history manifested itself in the enlightened monarch and the centralized State, not the violent resistance of the lower classes. However, it is surely unfair to accuse Hegel of being a precursor of fascism.²¹⁹

One way to understand Hegel's position is by grasping his radicalism as essentially bourgeois. This is to say that Hegel was in favor of constitutional government, freedom of the press, equality before the law, public trial by jury, and popular participation in legislature, but he was opposed to anything resembling a "rule of the rabble." Like Tracy, Hegel, being an employee of the state bureaucracy, wanted nothing to do with the poor and uneducated masses and did not include them in his understanding of republicanism. Thus, the fact that Hegel advocated, relatively consistently, bourgeois ideals was not in conflict with his denunciation of the revolutionary strife that broke out in 1830 all over Europe; indeed, the latter was emblematic for the limits of Hegel's philosophy of history as the product of the "fight to the death" for recognition (or what is commonly called the master-slave dialectic and should more accurately be referred to as the theory of "lordship and bondage").

sympathies for the student movement. Hegel supported the government's actions, a decision which demonstrated Hegel's conviction that the State has the right to dictate to the university, but which made his supposed liberalism questionable in the eyes of his contemporaries.

²¹⁹ See, especially, Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2: *Hegel and Marx* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1966).

The Young Hegelians, who appropriated Hegel's concept of negation and movement in a revolutionary manner, justly criticized Hegel for colluding with a tyrannical regime but elaborated Hegel's critique of metaphysics, which they recognized for its radical form. More recently, Hegel's views regarding Christianity have been subject to discussion. Based largely on the fact that Hegel repeatedly referred to Christianity as the perfect or absolute religion,²²⁰ it has been charged that Hegel tried to chart a middle course between the supernaturalists and the advocates of the Enlightenment, stressing the identity of religion and philosophy more than the difference – and approvingly so. That is, it has been suggested that Hegel's claim that religion was logically superseded or “sublated” (*aufgehoben* or “dissolved”) by philosophy was mitigated by Hegel's concept of resolution, which rested on the idea that the old would be retained (also *aufgehoben* or “preserved”) in the new. Moreover, it has been pointed out that the act of according ontological primacy to a Consciousness beyond human existence is, for all intents and purposes, a religious gesture. What is often forgotten in this debate, however, is something the Young Hegelians perceived keenly, namely that Hegel's apparently charitable position towards Christianity was a drastic departure from the traditional dogma of revealed religion.²²¹ William J. Brazill has expressed this aspect of Hegel's philosophy as follows:

If Hegel's philosophy justified Christianity, as the Hegelians of the Right believed, it also created some difficulties in terms of orthodox religion. For Christianity is essentially theism, and the end of the Hegelian philosophy would render theism only a distorted representation of the truth. A God, external to man, who saved man by loving grace was a distorted representation of the spirit immanent in man. If God were a force, and not a person, and if man became one with God not as an individual but as part of humanity, as part of the historical

²²⁰ David McLellan, for example, maintained that Hegel considered himself an orthodox Lutheran (*The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*. London: McMillan, 1969), 2.

²²¹ (*The Young Hegelians* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970], 47-48).

process, what happened to the Christian doctrines of redemption and personal immortality? . . . There were further problems in Hegel's denial of transcendence and his insistence that history was the development of the immanent spirit. If God were present in all of history, if all of history were the story of his development to final unity, then how explain the moment of incarnation? Was it possible, in view of his teaching that God was immanent in all of history, to see the appearance of Jesus as a unique phenomenon, a unique appearance of God in history? How distinguish between God in history at one moment and God in history in general? If human history was a continuing incarnation, could there have been a unique incarnation?"

Hegel's accomplishment was to break with the conventional notion that humans were the *imago dei* by proposing that they were gradually becoming one with God, a notion that Feuerbach was to extend by collapsing God completely into humanity and declaring humankind divine. Furthermore, Hegel's pantheism, for which he was much reviled and chastised, was blatantly subversive because it was tied to the assertion that the concept of God as a person was a "pictorial" or "naïve" truth only. Hegel may have denied the accusations of atheism, but his notion of a universal spirit alive in the world was Spinozist,²²² i.e. monist and proto-materialist, in inspiration. Therefore, Hegel's high regard for Christianity must be understood in conjunction with his historicization of Spinoza's "Substance." Hegel's "Absolute" went through successive stages: natural religion, artistic religion, and absolute religion. The last of these, Christianity, inaugurated the transition from transcendence to immanence by way of its "symbol," the God-Man Jesus Christ. Only speculative philosophy, according to Hegel, was able to fully recognize that the union of God and Man was the union of spirit and matter, an

²²² Baruch Spinoza, the Dutch Jew and influential post-Cartesian rationalist of the eighteenth century, is often considered the founder of biblical criticism. He has also been viewed as one of the main precursors of the Enlightenment. His pantheist monism held that God and Nature were one and the same: the universal substance. It was this conflation of the Deity and all of existence which prompted the Jewish community to excommunicate him during his lifetime and which brought him much vilification from conservative thinkers after his death. Recently, Spinoza's thought has undergone a renaissance in post-Marxist theory, for instance in the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (See, for instance, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* [New York: The Penguin Press, 2004]).

original union that was going through a process of self-realization. For Hegel, as for many of the Young Hegelians, Christianity was an advance over Judaism and “primitive” religion because its positing of the birth of Jesus mediated a critical moment in Spirit’s path toward self-consciousness.²²³ In other words, the idea of an event when God became Man was for Hegel a representation of the truth that Mind is always-already embodied.²²⁴ Therefore, the Christian God is superior to the Judaic God who is completely abstract. While Christianity is inferior to philosophy, it is also like philosophy because it too grasps (though imperfectly) the unity of the divine and the human and because in this respect it is essentially a critique of metaphysics. The anti-Judaic (and hence anti-Semitic) premise of these assertions is, of course, troubling in light of later developments, but within the framework of Christian dogma, Hegel’s rejection of *a priori* abstraction was fundamentally radical.²²⁵

Hegel shared with the French theorists of the bourgeois Revolution the project of reorganizing public life according to the principles of reason. Opposing “unthinking” rebellion, Hegel took a similar *Bildung* approach to the transformation of society. While Tracy was a seasoned politician and Hegel more of a traditional scholar, both Tracy’s and Hegel’s bourgeois liberalism was predicated on the idea that education was the key to

²²³ A general ambiguity about the status of religion persisted in some of Hegel’s disciples; Bruno Bauer, for example, viewed Christianity as both a necessary stage in history and yet a paradigmatic case of mythical thinking. In contrast to Hegel, however, Bauer veered markedly toward what can be considered anti-Semitism in his attitude toward Judaism, especially in his later writings.

²²⁴ There is also considerable ambiguity in Hegel’s position on the doctrine of incarnation. It seems that he did not conceive of it simply as false (i.e. as a fiction) but also as true (i.e. as necessity). The split caused by alienation, which for Hegel was the essential condition of history, was to be mended by the merging of the divine and the world. Jesus, in Hegel’s eyes, was a real mediation of this promise of future resolution. However, the question of whether Jesus was indeed the son of God was largely a non-issue for him. As far as Hegel was concerned, the union of the ideal and the corporal in the person of Jesus was an expression (symbolic or real) of the process of the continuous externalization of Spirit.

²²⁵ The anti-transcendent thrust in Hegel’s philosophy and its import for Young Hegelianism has generally been acknowledged by Hegel scholars. See, for instance, Löwith’s classic work *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 28 and 55.

progress. Thus, they attempted to make their influence felt in the administration of the school and university system. Hegel, in particular, sought impact on politics by way of controlling academic appointments and shaping curricular developments. In fact, a contemporary is said to have remarked that Hegel “was unlike other philosophers in that he did not aim merely at founding a ‘sect’ or ‘school,’ but at training an activist party or ‘faction’ that would take on a directive, organizing role, and thus achieve ‘external significance’ in political and cultural institutions.”²²⁶ Further, like Tracy, Hegel took a keen interest in social reality. Historian John Edward Toews has emphasized this aspect of Hegel’s thinking. He corroborates the reading of Hegel as a “practical” philosopher when he says that “Hegel never conceived of philosophy as an esoteric discipline for professional thinkers, but viewed his writing and teaching as directly relevant to the most acutely felt and universally experienced existential needs and interests of man.”²²⁷ Further, Toews asserts that Hegel “revealed the greatest concern for the specificities of social and political life and the need to discern the actualization of the absolute in the differentiated and complex structures of man’s economic activities, social relations, and political institutions.” He sees this concern evinced in the fact that the early Hegel “devoted much of his time to the investigation of political economy, history, and constitutional theory, and his interests were continually aroused by signs of political and social transformation.”²²⁸

²²⁶ Cited in Toews, *Hegelianism*, 73.

²²⁷ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 64. Toews argues forcefully that the idea of reconciliation was not escapist and that Hegel was genuinely concerned to bridge the gap between real and ideal, between being and thought. However, he also points out that this project was always dominated by an elitism that was quite opposed not only to reactionary populism but also to the proletarian uprisings of the nineteenth century. Reform was believed to be the business of the intellectual and political leadership caste.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

It is difficult to deny that Hegel's effort to reconcile human existence and its apparently futile earthly affairs with God's boundless but conspicuously remote fullness had a certain mystical quality due to its appeals to a transcendent power.²²⁹ However, Hegel was viewed by the Left Hegelians as the fulfillment of Lessing's prophesy of emancipation because his idealism lacked the focus on the ecstatic experience of the divine in the mundane that characterized the philosophy of feeling of the later Schelling and that of Schleiermacher. They had posited that only a leap of faith could establish the connection between an individual and God, and that this connection could only be sensed internally, in a state of rapture. This approach, however, closed the human being off from the particular objective reality in which she lived, and Hegel realized that. John Edward Toews expresses this when he says that, though Hegel, "[t]he world that constituted the hell of "otherness" for the Romantic ego locked in its narcissistic subjectivity became the spiritual home of the transformed self."²³⁰

Hegel's Radical Legacy in Twentieth-Century Marxism

The question of how to read Hegel as a materialist, to paraphrase Althusser, continues to loom large.²³¹ Certainly, Hegel's denunciation of the Kantian "ought" (to strive for the ever-receding transcendent ideal) represented a radical move towards this-worldly theories of reality. Equally secularizing in its effect was Hegel's insistence that the historical process was accessible to the human mind – because the human mind was

²²⁹ While in 1800, Hegel still held the early Romantic notion that the only possibility for reaching the Absolute was through creative intuition and faith, Hegel soon revised this view, subordinating art and religion to science and rationality (*Verstand*), which he felt held the key to the reason of history (*Vernunft*).

²³⁰ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 160.

²³¹ Referring to Lenin's notebooks on Hegel, Althusser points out that Lenin "regards as practically *materialist*" certain chapters of Hegel's *Logic*." Althusser further claims, "He [Lenin] read Hegel, and the phrase constantly recurs, as a 'materialist'" (*Lenin and Philosophy*, 75).

integral to that very process. Disagreeing with Kant's positing of the unknowable "thing in itself," Hegel's thinking subject could grasp the workings of the Spirit because its unitary, orderly, and law-like pattern was manifest in the facts of the world. However, if, according to Hegel, "science" was one key instrument through which "Man" could understand history, this science was not the blind empiricism and fact fetishism of the kind that is often attributed to Leopold von Ranke.²³² That said, Hegel always thought of his philosophy as a science, a science of history, a scientific philosophy that had discovered the true kernel of religion while superseding it. Towards the end of Hegel's life, the "Society for Scientific Criticism" was founded in 1826 in an attempt to provide a forum for Hegelians to exchange and popularize their ideas. It was to counterbalance the power of the "Historical School," which dominated the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences and had excluded Hegel from it. (The Historical School [of Law], based in Berlin, included among its followers Schleiermacher, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich Carl von Savigny, Franz Bopp, Karl Lachmann, and Phillip August Böckh. It was conservative in its propagation of Romantic, nationalist philosophies but posed a much more immediate danger than Hegel's philosophy to the Prussian regime because of its engagement in active resistance against the State.)

The Young Hegelians understood Hegel to have said that if there was reason in the world, this reason was inherent in human history. For the Young Hegelians, the Absolute was emphatically not an extra-terrestrial force but a principle within mundane reality. As I have explained, Hegel's idea that history was the progressive unfolding and externalization of *Geist*, which, having alienated itself in the world, would ultimately

²³² Klaus Vieweg's foreword to the recent edition of Hegel's *Die Philosophie der Geschichte* emphasizes this two-fold perspective of Hegel (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005); see 10-12.

return to self-consciousness was interpreted by the Young Hegelians as meaning that *Geist* was nothing other than the human essence and that the subject-object of history was actually “Man.” In the final analysis, it may have been Hegel’s emphasis on change that constituted the most pivotal starting point for the Young Hegelians. Furnished with Hegel’s notion that the present is only a passing moment, which needed to, and was inevitably going to, be overcome, the Young Hegelians were able to confront those who wanted to represent the actually existing order as absolute and final. Change, in other words, became the inescapable truth of all things and negation the basis of all things positive. Critique was only the conscious expression of the principle of negation. Further, a sense of the imperative of movement was as essential for the Young Hegelians’ concept of the crucial role of human agency. In their reception of Hegel, the dialectical process was not a process extraneous to human activity. Human consciousness and action were the instruments of the “cunning of reason.” In other words, the Hegelian Left produced a revolutionary, rather than a determinist and teleological, interpretation of Hegel, and that interpretation had a lasting influence on later critical theory. It was *this* Hegel, the Hegel who knew about human will and human practice, the revolutionary Hegel – rather than the accommodationist Hegel – who (however unwittingly) helped prepare the ground for Marx’s profoundly materialist approach to history.²³³

²³³ For an entirely different assessment of Hegel, see Werner Becker, *Idealistische und materialistische Dialektik: Das Verhältnis von ‘Herrschaft und Knechtschaft’ bei Hegel und Marx* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1970). Becker challenges the notion of Hegel as a radical thinker and argues that “diese Einschätzung von Hegels dialektischer Philosophie ist falsch und im Marxschen Sinn selber ideologisch. Weder kann die Dialektik für eine Kritik an unberechtigten Absolutsetzungen in Anspruch genommen werden, noch läßt sich Hegels Philosophie als eine aufgeklärte und rationale Philosophie verstehen” (15).

While it has been argued that the “question of Hegel’s materialism” is “futile,”²³⁴ this chapter takes as its departure an observation made by Marx’s contemporary Heinrich Heine who has famously argued in *The Romantic School* (1836) that in contrast to Schelling, Hegel had worked for a state that was based on the notion of secular progress and legitimized a church based on the principle of equal access to knowledge.²³⁵ Over a century later, György Lukács reinforced this reading of Hegel as a radical thinker from a Marxist perspective. His classic *The Young Hegel* (published in 1948 but finished for the most part a decade earlier) was written with the express purpose of taking Hegel from the neo-Kantians, such as Dilthey (whose monograph on the Young Hegel had come out in 1906). As Lukács explains in the preface to the 1954 edition, he viewed his work as an extension of his critique of the new irrationalism, also the theme of his earlier *The Destruction of Reason*.²³⁶ In this work, Lukács sides with Lenin in the debate over the Marx-Hegel relationship and upholds the notion that, despite the “defects” of his

²³⁴ See, for instance, the work by the early Lucio Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel* (London: NLB, 1973 [1969]), in which he argues that the thesis of Hegel’s philosophy as internally incoherent and as “half idealist, and half materialist” (51) is unconvincing. He attributes this interpretation to the tradition of dialectical materialism of Engels, Plekhanov, and Lenin, which he claims is no less idealist than Hegel’s thought, and rejects it in favor of a more Kantian approach to Marx. This take on the Hegel-Marx relationship is similar to the argument Benedetto Croce made a few decades earlier in his *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx* (London: Howard Latimer, 1966 [1914]).

Not making a distinction between Engels and Marx but allowing the distinction between the early and the mature Marx, Croce asserts that “Hegelianism was the *early inspiration* of the youthful Marx” (6) but that there is no “*logical relation* . . . between the two philosophical theories” (82, note 1). Interestingly, Croce severs the connection between naturalistic materialism and historical materialism; thus, he says that while “metaphysical materialism, at which Marx and Engels, starting from the extreme Hegelian left, easily arrived, supplied the name and some of the components of their view of history . . . both the name and these components are really extraneous to the true character of their conception” (7). That is, according to Croce, there existed no connection between theoretical socialism on the one hand and the materialism of Holbach and Helvetius on the other, despite the assertions of Plekhanov (8). He agrees here largely with Labriola. See also G. V. Plekhanov, *Essays in the History of Materialism*, trans. by Ralph Fox (London: John Lane, 1934) and Antonio Labriola, *Essays on the Materialistic Conception of History*, trans. by Charles H. Kerr (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966 [1903]).

²³⁵ Heinrich Heine, *The Romantic School*, trans. by S. L. Fleishman (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1882).

²³⁶ Jean Hyppolite’s existentialist reading of Hegel seemed to Lukács a prime example of this irrationalist trend.

philosophy, Hegel was in fact “one of the precursors of historical materialism.”²³⁷ In the chapter on “Labour and Teleology,” for instance, he posits Hegel as a thinker of worldly progress:

In Hegel, on the other hand [as opposed to Schelling], the precise analysis of the labour process led to the real concretization both of human praxis and of man’s relationship with nature. . . . The dialectical concretization of human activity which we find in Hegel’s teleology of labour also dramatizes the mediating processes that link human praxis with the idea of social progress. In the old teleology the relative values place on means and ends were necessarily false. The metaphysical analysis tended towards a rigid polarization of the two concepts; since the ends were inevitably idealized and since they were the product of a consciousness, idealist philosophies always placed a higher value on them than on the means. . . .

As far as immediate needs are concerned Hegel too does not dispute that in the first instance the ends stand higher than the means. . . . But Hegel also shows the concrete objective dialectics of the labour-process which necessarily lead beyond the standpoint of immediate consciousness. And here is that progress lies.²³⁸

And then, quoting from the *Phenomenology*, he criticizes:

Hegel fails to notice here that the consistent application of his own teleological principle leads him back into the old theological conception of teleology. His great philosophical achievement had been to take the concept of purpose down from Heaven, where the theologians had placed it, and bring it back to earth, to the reality of actual human action. His concept of teleology remained great, original and creative as long as it remained earthly. But by taking his ideas to their logical conclusion he destroys as an objective idealist, what he had laboriously built up as a dialectician. In this theological twist to his thought there is a lasting affinity between Hegel and Schelling which outlasts their disagreements.

But we must never lose sight of the fact that this affinity is an affinity imposed on them by the defects of their idealism. The difference between them is that before Hegel lost his way in the miasmas of idealism where a mystified demiurge carried on its ‘activities’, he made a great detour in the course of which he made innumerable fundamental dialectical discoveries. He then pushed forward to that frontier which no idealist can cross. This antithesis between system and method is rudimentary in Schelling and in time it gradually disappears altogether. For this reason what the historian of philosophy must emphasize is the differences between the two views of historical development.²³⁹

²³⁷ Ibid., 338. György Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics* (London: Merlin Press, 1975), 357. Lukács identifies the main reason for Hegel’s failure in his “ . . . ignorance of the class struggle as a motive force in society” (358).

²³⁸ Ibid., 347.

²³⁹ Ibid., 363.

At about the same time, Herbert Marcuse undertook a similar attempt at vindicating Hegel's image. Less critical than Lukács, Marcuse famously claimed in his *Reason and Revolution* (1941) that Hegel's system was never the "obscure metaphysics" that it is often said to be.²⁴⁰ According to Marcuse, "Hegel's concept of reason thus has a distinctly critical and polemic character. It is opposed to all ready acceptance of the given state of affairs. It denies the hegemony of every prevailing form of existence by demonstrating the antagonisms that dissolve it into other forms."²⁴¹ Marcuse notes further that the link between the French Revolution and Hegelian idealism is expressly manifest "[i]n his [Hegel's] early writings, [where] no gap exists between the philosophical and social meaning of these principles [of reason and freedom], which are expressed in the same revolutionary language the French Jacobins used."²⁴² Marcuse goes on to contrast German idealism with Anglo-French empiricism in a manner sympathetic to the Idealist tradition, maintaining that the latter had completely abandoned the notion of universality in favor of particularity and therefore had to remain essentially conservative and conformist, within the confines of what exists, the former held on to the "universal" and was therefore able to aim at transcending the existing order. In the sense that "truth" for Hegel was not only an attribute of thought but an attribute of reality, a state of being where reality is in "fulfillment of its potentialities,"²⁴³ Marcuse claimed that,

Hegel's philosophy is indeed what the subsequent reaction termed it, a negative philosophy. It is originally motivated by the conviction that the given facts that

²⁴⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), 5. Marcuse's *Hegel's Ontology and Theory of Historicity*, published in 1832, foregrounded some of his arguments in *Reason and Revolution*, even though Heidegger's influence was more noticeable in this work, which was Marcuse's *Habilitation*, written under the direction of Heidegger (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987]).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 25.

appear to common sense as the positive index of truth are in reality the negation of truth, so that truth can only be established by their destruction.

Hegel's philosophy, however, which begins with the negation of the given and retains this negativity throughout, concludes with the declaration that history has achieved the reality of reason. His basic concepts were still bound up with the social structure of the prevailing system, and in this respect, too, German idealism may be said to have preserved the heritage of the French Revolution.

However, the "reconciliation of idea and reality," . . . contains a decisive element that points beyond mere reconciliation. This element has been preserved and utilized in the later doctrine of the negation of philosophy. Philosophy reaches its end when it has formulated its view of a world in which reason is realized. If at that point reality contains the conditions necessary to materialize reason in fact, thought can cease to concern itself with the idea. The truth now would require actual historical practice to fulfill it. With the relinquishment of the idea, philosophy relinquishes its critical task and passes it to another agency. The final culmination of philosophy is thus at the same time its abdication. Released from its preoccupation with the ideal, philosophy is also released from its opposition to reality. This means that it ceases to be philosophy. It does not follow, however, that thought must then comply with the existing order. Critical thinking does not cease, but assumes a new form. The efforts of reason devolve upon social theory and social practice.²⁴⁴

When the early Frankfurt School was writing about Marx and Hegel, Alexandre Kojève was giving his famous Hegel lectures in France (1933-39). Kojève's exegetical work on the *Phenomenology* was to become the perhaps most influential interpretation of Hegel in the twentieth century.²⁴⁵ While there have been critics who argue that Kojève's reading of Hegel was fundamentally conservative and inevitably produced the end-of-history philosophy of Francis Fukuyama and the cultural pessimism of Allan Bloom, *via* Strauß,²⁴⁶ I would argue that Kojève's approach to Hegel was more Marxian than Heideggerian and relatively distinct from the poststructuralist and liberal-reactionary

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 26-8.

²⁴⁵ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, ass. by Raymond Queneau, ed. by Alan Bloom, and trans. by James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).

²⁴⁶ Shadia Drury, *Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994). In the preface, Drury declares, "This book is the story of the metamorphosis of Kojève's Marxist conception of the 'realm of freedom' into the world of Nietzsche's last man" (x). The basic premise of Drury's work is that Kojève's reading of Hegel is "singularly flawed" (4) and that this flaw has been underestimated in the literature. According to Drury, Kojève's ideas were a blend of Marxism and Heideggerianism, which produced a supposedly anti-dialectical, pessimistic, and idealist reading (e.g. 11-2).

approaches that were inspired by him.²⁴⁷ I would also argue that Kojève went to great lengths to affirm and develop not only the secular but the dialectical-materialist aspects of Hegel's philosophy. It is true that Kojève was interested primarily in (self)consciousness, in discourse, and in the "Concept" (as revealed to itself),²⁴⁸ but many of his remarks in "The Dialectic of the Real and the Phenomenological Method of Hegel" attest to the fundamentally anti-idealist thrust of Hegel's "science." So Kojève says, for instance, that

in order to discover the dialectical character of Being as such and of the Real in general, it was sufficient for Hegel to take the notion of the *concrete* seriously and to remember that philosophy must describe the *concrete* real instead of forming more or less arbitrary *abstractions*. . . . For if Man and his historical World exist really and concretely, on an equal level with the natural World, the *concrete* Real and Being itself which actually *is* imply a human reality and hence Negativity in addition to the natural reality. And this is to say, as we know, that Being and the Real are dialectical. . . . Now Hegel does not merely say that his philosophy refers to the *concrete* reality. He also asserts that the philosophy which preceded him, and the vulgar sciences and "naïve" man as well, are all concerned with *abstractions*. Now, the concrete real is dialectical. Abstractions are not. And that is why only Hegelian Science reveals or describes the real Dialectic.²⁴⁹

When it comes to defining negativity, Kojève clearly states that "Negation is *realized* as accomplished *action*, and not as thought or simple desire. Hence it is neither in his more or less "elevated" "ideas" (or his imagination), nor by his more or less "sublime" or "sublimated" aspirations that Man is truly free or really human but only in and by effective – i.e., active – negation of the given real."²⁵⁰ This act of "creation" takes

²⁴⁷ For a cursory summary of these three Hegelianisms with respect to the master-slave dialectic, see, for instance, Leo Rauch and David Sherman, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Self-Consciousness: Text and Commentary* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), especially "Early-Twentieth-Century European Criticism," 125-60. The authors also discuss Heidegger and Gadamer, whom they oppose to the French thinkers and whom they view as the precursors of poststructuralist views on Hegel (see "The Denial of the Self: The Repudiation of Hegelian Self-Consciousness in Recent European Thought," 161-222.)

²⁴⁸ See, for instance, Kojève's comment in "A Note on Eternity, Time, and the Concept" that defines the radicalism of Hegel in terms of his conceptualization of history as "speaking existing" (in Kojève, *Introduction*).

²⁴⁹ Kojève, *Introduction*, 210.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 222.

place essentially “without a preconceived idea”²⁵¹ but through struggle.²⁵² This is the point where the humanist Hegelianism of Kojève and the orthodox Marxism of Plekhanov agree: They both share a notion of Hegel as the thinker of history as worldly *Geschehen* (events) and of dialectics as concrete activity. Even if Plekhanov states unambiguously that, in the end, Hegel left “the real ground of actuality and . . . [entered] the kingdom of the shadows,”²⁵³ he also acknowledges just as firmly that “materialism after Hegel became something quite different from what it was before him.”²⁵⁴

In closing, I wish to remark that linking Hegel and Marx does not necessarily result in a blunting of Marx’s critical social theory, as the early Sydney Hook has maintained.²⁵⁵ Hook’s argument that we must “close the door tight to attempts at ‘*Ergänzung*’ [sic.] Marx by Hegelianizing him” and recognize that “[t]he two

²⁵¹ Ibid., 223. At this point Kojève inadvertently resolves the supposed contradiction in Marx regarding the famous “bee problem” (In *Capital*, Marx makes the following remark: “A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality” [Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, MEGA 2, Section 2, Vol. 9 [Berlin: Dietz, 1990], 154). The problem that has emerged from interpretations of this passage is that it seemingly contradicts the materialist thesis, according to which consciousness is not the chief characteristic that distinguishes animals from humans and is always produced *in response to*, but not prior to, material activity.

Kojève, in a footnote, explains that the automobile was not there before people created the automobile; rather, their specifically human practice of negation – the realization of creative desire, as he conceives it – produces the object and the idea of the object, but the latter does not pre-exist the former (Kojève, *Introduction*, 229, note 24). I would argue that this is true not only for Hegel but for Marx as well: If “[a]t the end of the labour process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement,” it is because “he realises a purpose” (MEGA 2, Section 2, Vol. 9, 154). This does not mean that there is an abstract idea existing separately from the concrete situation in which a particular person begins a particular process of laboring.

²⁵² 231. In this context, it is worth considering the argument of Postone who rejects the identification of history and labor. I would claim, however, that he conflates labor as such and industrial labor.

²⁵³ Plekhanov, *Essays on the History of Materialism*, 182.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 188. It is also interesting to note that Plekhanov’s book ties Marx directly to the French Enlightenment by devoting one essay to Holbach, one to Helvetius, and one to Marx.

²⁵⁵ See Sydney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962). This work was the first systematic analysis of post-Hegelian thought in English. However, Sydney Hook’s career was marked by a fundamental intellectual and political shift. A student of Dewey, he was a politically active fellow traveler of the Communist party in his early years but developed into a fervent anti-Communist some time before WW II. In 1985, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Ronald Reagan. (For an interesting, fairly recent work on the early Hook, see Christopher Phelps, *Young Sidney Hook: Marxist and Pragmatist* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).)

philosophies are utterly opposed in substance and in spirit”²⁵⁶ does justice to Marx’s own representations of his relation to Hegel and throws into sharp relief Marx’s break with, and advance over, Hegelianism, but it leaves unanswered the question that Hook himself poses, namely how Hegel could have given rise to a tradition of radical social theory.²⁵⁷ This question has been answered by thinkers as disparate as Karl Korsch,²⁵⁸ Theodor Adorno,²⁵⁹ and Slavoj Žižek.²⁶⁰ Their interest in a radical Hegel, has, however, marked a definite departure from Marxist theory and has, as some have argued, and I would agree, in fact signaled a return to more idealist ways of thinking. Ultimately, it seems that the reduction of Hegel’s philosophy to its most radical kernel, *when coupled with a concomitant reduction of Marxian theory to this radical Hegelian kernel*, will indeed result in different kind of idealism, a materialist one perhaps but an abstract and empty one, as might be the case with one of the most staunchly anti-humanist readings of Marx.

²⁵⁶ Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*, 41.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 15.

²⁵⁸ See Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, trans. by Fred Halliday (London: NLB, 1970 [1923]). Taking his cue from Lenin, one of the two originators of so-called Western Marxism, elaborates the doctrine, against those Marxists who considered philosophy irrelevant for communist practice, that Hegel’s dialectical principle was “rescued” by “the two young Hegelians Marx and Engels . . . from German philosophy and transferred to the materialist conception of history and society” (34). He explains further that the “essential and necessary relation between German idealism and Marxism” (42) can only be grasped properly when it becomes clear that “[s]ince the Marxist system is the theoretical expression of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat, and German idealist philosophy is the theoretical expression of the revolutionary movement of the bourgeoisie, they must stand intelligently and historically (i.e. ideologically) in the same relation to each other as the revolutionary movement of the proletariat as a class stands to the revolutionary movement of the bourgeoisie, in the realm of social and political practice (42).

²⁵⁹ See, for example, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993 [1963]). Adorno, of course, defends speculation and idealism in his attempts to produce a reading of Hegel as revolutionary that does not rely on what Adorno perceives as “the trivial aperçu according to which Hegel, the absolute idealist, was a great realist and a man with a sharp historical eye” (2). Rather, Adorno -- not unlike Engels -- views Hegel’s dialectics as inherently transgressive because “[i]t is incompatible with any kind of tendency to harmony, no matter how much the late Hegel may subjectively have had such tendencies.” And, explaining himself, Adorno states that “in him [Hegel], connection is not a matter of unbroken transition but a matter of sudden change, and the process takes place not through the moments approaching one another but through rupture” (4-5).

²⁶⁰ Žižek’s interest in Hegel is directly related to his effort to revive a radical idealist philosophy. In *Tarrying with the Negative*, for instance, Žižek wants to “raise the inverse possibility of a Hegelian critique of Marx” (26). Redefining materialism in what can be argued to be idealist terms (see, for instance, *The Parallax View* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006], 17), Žižek proposes that we read Marx as Hegelians.

The perhaps paradigmatic example for this tendency is Althusser, who disregards the concretely social and immediately practical nature of the historical process, which Marx developed from the Left Hegelian legacy and formulated in *The German Ideology*, when he praises Lenin for taking

from Hegel the following proposition: there is only one thing in the world which is absolute, and that is the method or the concept of the process, itself absolute. . . . Lenin finds in it a confirmation of the fact that it is absolutely essential (as he had learnt simply from a thorough-going reading of *Capital*) to *suppress every origin and every subject, and to say: what is absolute is the process without a subject*, both in reality and in scientific knowledge.²⁶¹

Marx was able, partly on the basis of the theoretical work of the New Hegelian Left, to fill the dialectical form with the *particular content* of the historical process.

²⁶¹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 82.

CHAPTER 2

The Hegelian School and its Detractors:

A Historical Perspective

As we have seen, Hegel's doctrine, taken as a whole, left plenty of room to accommodate the most diverse practical party views. And in the theoretical Germany of that time, two things were practical above all; religion and politics. Whoever placed the emphasis on the Hegelian *system* could be fairly conservative in both spheres; whoever regarded the dialectical *method* as the main thing could belong to the most extreme opposition, both in religion and politics. Hegel himself, despite the fairly frequent outbursts of revolutionary wrath in his works, seemed on the whole to be more inclined to the conservative side. . . . Towards the end of the thirties, the cleavage in the school became more and more apparent. The Left wing, the so-called Young Hegelians, in their fight with the pietist orthodox and the feudal reactionaries, abandoned bit by bit that philosophical-genteel reserve in regard to the burning questions of the day which up to that time had secured state toleration and even protection for their teachings. . . . The fight was still carried on with philosophical weapons, but no longer for abstract philosophical aids. It turned directly on the destruction of traditional religion and the existing state. (Friedrich Engels, *Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*)²⁶²

In *Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Engels moves from his critique of Hegel to a critique of Feuerbach but not without first emphasizing the radical aspects of the Leftist philosophers of the so-called “end-of-philosophy” debate. His portrayal of a progressive “decomposition process of the Hegelian school”²⁶³ stresses the distance traveled between the reformist but also conformist secularism of Hegel's philosophy and the revolutionary criticism of the Young Hegelians. While it has since become customary to separate the anti-Christian radicals, including Strauß, Feuerbach, and Bauer, from the social and political criticism of people like Ruge, Hess, or Marx, this

²⁶² *CW* 26, 362-3.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 364.

passage by Engels presents the two main strands of Left Hegelian philosophy as closely intertwined. In the framework of this dissertation, the advantage of comparing and contrasting the different modes of Leftist Hegelian thought is that it makes visible how the attack on idealist metaphysics was not merely a struggle against the modern regime of Church and State but also a battle of philosophy with itself.

It is probably true that the critique of society succeeded the critique of theology in response to the gradual decline of the authority of established religion in favor of a more strictly secular government, just as the critique of capital was a result of the historical supersession of the rule of the Church by the rise of capitalism and bourgeois society, following the industrial revolution. In other words, what separated Marx's historical materialism from the political critique of liberal and socialist thinkers like Ruge, and what separated the latter from Strauß's historicization of the Bible was not a logical development but an effect of specific material changes. However, partly because of the particular conditions in Germany, as Marx argued, critical theory before Marx was characterized to a large extent by a relative ignorance of the economic shifts that had taken place in England and France and were beginning to take place in other countries in Western Europe, as well as the global dynamics that were fuelling those shifts. For this reason, the premise of the present chapter is that Marx's intervention in Young Hegelianism was more significant than the difference between the two original groups of Young Hegelians. At the same time, I will address certain internal differences as a means of illustrating the deep disparities among the Left Hegelians.

The southern group, which was focused mostly on the critique of Christian doctrine, will figure most prominently in the discussion. This treatment is justified not

only by the fact that the Leftist critique of religion and philosophy that culminated in Feuerbach was paradigmatic for the Young Hegelian movement as a whole but also because it provided the pivotal influence on Stirner's work and occasioned Marx and Engels's break with Young Hegelianism. Because the first part of *The German Ideology*, the subject of the final three chapters, is concerned primarily with "[t]he entire body of German philosophical criticism from Strauß to Stirner [which] is confined to criticism of *religious* conceptions,"²⁶⁴ I shall concentrate here on the religious criticism in Young Hegelian thought. The second part of *The German Ideology* deals primarily with socialist thinkers and was probably designed to include essays on Ruge, alias "Dottore Graziano," and Hess, but a discussion of the more explicitly political Young Hegelians and Marx's critique of them is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Resistance and Repression

The radicalism of the Left Hegelians was largely a function of their outsider status in relation to the institutions of political and academic power. Their marginality was in sharp contrast to Hegel's eminence. Hegel had been holding prestigious positions at several universities (eventually becoming rector of the University of Berlin), shaping German higher education indirectly – by way of popularity and discipleship – and directly – through his close contacts with ministers and other officials. While Tracy had been subject to Napoleon's censorship and hence felt compelled to publish some of his works anonymously, the Hegelian radicals were much more aggressively silenced, persecuted, and even imprisoned, without the protection afforded by titles and ranks. This

²⁶⁴ *CW* 5, 29.

difficult situation was due to the repressive climate during the Europe-wide Restoration in the aftermath of the French Revolution. In the German Confederation, the liberal movements of the *Vormärz* period were countered and effectively fought by the harsh reactionary policies of Metternich's government. The Carlsbad Decrees of 1819, which severely restricted freedom of speech, particularly in the universities, were in many ways emblematic for the crass anti-democratic measures taken against everyone who was considered a threat.

The liberal push for reform, i.e. for representational government, public elections, freedom of the press, etc., was more modest in Germany than in France.²⁶⁵ However, it formed part of the background against which the Young Hegelian criticism of divine and, by extension, monarchical sovereignty took shape. There was also the "social problem," which increasingly became a pressing concern for bourgeois progressives, including the Young Hegelians, particularly in Prussia. After the *Bauernbefreiung*, wide-spread pauperism and the creation of an urban proletariat became an ever more visible and permanent presence, and the political turmoil that ensued in response to deepening economic hardship afflicting the masses was viewed more and more as a manifestation of a deep, underlying crisis. But, as indicated, conflict arose also from the violent backlash orchestrated by the conservative forces. The concerted effort on the part of the state to stifle any and all dissident voices at all cost was perhaps *the* critical practical problem for leftist intellectuals at the time. The Hegelians in particular became the target of the

²⁶⁵ Toews's argument here is that the German liberalism that resurfaced in the 1830s, after its temporary defeat, was a petty-bourgeois, professional, or bureaucratic liberalism that was cautious in its sole focus on the *Rechtsstaat*. He says that the German liberals did not "aim at parliamentary control of the executive power, but sought a reform of administration and law in accordance with the ideal of a *Rechtsstaat*. Their practical demands were usually restricted to the abolition of remaining legal inequality and privilege and the creation of institutional safeguards against the abuse of executive power: freedom of the press, the separation of justice from administration, trial by jury" (*Hegelianism*, 208).

repressive measures. Especially after 1835, when the cultural and political atmosphere in Prussia and elsewhere turned more Pietist, when the selection of Hegel's successor was delayed by reactionary academics and politicians, when two chief patrons of Hegelian thought – Altenstein and Schulze – gradually lost their influence, that is when, according to Toews, “the Hegelian school was not merely on the defensive; it had begun to retreat before the aggressive assaults of its cultural opponents.”²⁶⁶

Because of his sympathies for Hegel and Hegelian ideas, Karl Sigmund Franz Freiherr vom Stein zum Altenstein, the Minister for Education and Culture in the Prussian “*Kultusministerium*” under Friedrich Wilhelm III had been *the* most important source of institutional and governmental support for the Hegelians from beginning to end. Altenstein had not only effected Hegel's appointment to the Chair of Philosophy in Berlin, he also secured academic positions for a number of Hegelians and protected them in the increasingly anti-Hegelian climate of the 1830's. To a certain degree, it was through Altenstein's engagement that Hegelianism became, for a while at least, as influential as it did. Johannes Karl Hartwig Schulze was Altenstein's associate, and together they were able to guarantee that the moderate and conservative students of Hegel continued to have an impact on the German academic apparatus, even after Hegel's death. Altenstein's own death in 1840, however, spelled the definite end of the Old Hegelian school in German philosophy, and the status of Hegelian philosophy, including that of the Left Hegelians, became even more precarious than it had already become. As for Schulze, his efforts were rendered more or less impotent under the new Minister Eichhorn.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 221.

²⁶⁷ Altenstein was first succeeded by Adalbert von Ladenberg, who was not too averse to the Hegelians, but the new king replaced him with the pro-religious, conservative Eichhorn in 1840 as *Kultusminister*.

A bad situation became worse when the anti-Hegelian conservative Johann Albrecht Friedrich Eichhorn replaced the liberal Karl von Altenstein as Minister for Education and Culture and Friedrich Wilhelm IV took the throne in 1840 after the death of Friedrich Wilhelm III.²⁶⁸ If the Left Hegelians' chances for professional security had been getting slimmer for a while, they disappeared almost completely under the new regime. These and other circumstances amounted to a conglomerate of factors that brought about the erosion of orthodox Hegelianism and a gradual shift in the political orientation of Hegelian philosophy towards open resistance against the *status quo*. This shift was not so much due to a general “*Linksrück*” (move to the left) among the Hegelians but rather to the fact that the Center Hegelians lost a significant amount of authority and the Left Hegelians gained in strength.²⁶⁹ The change that had taken place was apparent, among other things, from the decline of the *Jahrbücher* (1827-1846) in Berlin²⁷⁰ and the rise of Ruge's *Hallische Jahrbücher*²⁷¹ (1838-1843) as *the* major forum for Hegelian discourse.

The Young Hegelians, of course, were not the only oppositional force in German society at the time. For instance, it is important to distinguish the Young Hegelians from the Young Germans, a radical literary movement that was fairly influential. The

Jungdeutschen argued for freedom of (artistic and other) expression and engaged in an

²⁶⁸ Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Friedrich Schleiermacher died at about the same time, in 1832 and 1834 respectively.

²⁶⁹ In the highly charged atmosphere, however, several Center Hegelians, such as Friedrich Christoph Förster, Schulze, and Phillip Marheineke in Berlin, as well as Hermann Friedrich Wilhelm Hinrichs and Julius Schaller in Halle continued to do what they had been doing, but their work took on a more critical appearance. In some respects, this group may have felt closer to their left rivals than the Hegelians on the other end of the spectrum.

²⁷⁰ The *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik* had been founded in 1826 by the “*Kritische Vereinigung*” (including Gans and other orthodox Hegelians), an association dedicated to the discussion and promotion of Hegel's ideas.

²⁷¹ For a more detailed note on the *Hallische Jahrbücher für deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst*, see my discussion of the Young Hegelian journals further down. Some sources refer to the journal as the *Hallesche Jahrbücher*.

attempt to link literature with everyday life, to emphasize fleshly existence, and to politicize poetic writing.²⁷² The original arm of Young Germany consisted mostly of writers like Karl Gutzkow (whose book *Wally the Skeptic* [1836] was confiscated; Gutzkow himself was sent to prison), Ludolf Wienbarg, Theodor Mundt, and Heinrich Laube, as well as revolutionary poets like Georg Büchner, who followed in the steps of Heinrich Heine and Ludwig Börne.

Another radical group were the student associations or *Burschenschaften*. They were more directly subversive than other political dissidents and thus were placed under strict surveillance. Their views were progressive but nationalistic; in fact, their nationalism played an important role in supporting the *Wars of Liberation* (1813-1815) from Napoleonic France. Reacting to the threat perceived to emanate from the student associations, the State resorted to harsh measures. In response to the assassination in 1819 of dramatist August Friedrich Ferdinand von Kotzebue by the Jena student and *Burschenschaftler* Karl Ludwig Sand, who considered the anti-liberal Kotzebue to be a traitor of the cause for German unity, the student associations were outlawed and, as mentioned above, the Carlsbad Decrees (“*Karlsbader Beschlüsse*”) of 1819 established a tight regime of censorship and persecution (“*Demagogenverfolgung*”). Sand himself was executed in 1820.

Finally, there was also the nascent socialist movement that emerged in tandem with the popular uprisings of the 1830’s. The socialist Wilhelm Weitling has often been considered the first German theoretician of communism. He was an early exponent of the theory of class struggle, at which he had arrived by turning away from the French utopian

²⁷² There were similar movements across Europe, such as Young Poland (1890-1918), Young Italy (founded in 1831), Young Hungary, Young Ireland, and Young Europe (short lived, founded in 1834).

socialism of Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier and by coming to see the interests of the working class and those of the bourgeoisie as caught in a permanent conflict. Before Marx, Weitling had joined the so-called “*Bund der Geächteten*” (which was subsequently renamed the “*Bund der Gerechten*” and finally the “*Bund der Kommunisten*”).²⁷³

What the Young Hegelians had in common with these other groups was that they advocated the abolition of the remnants of the feudal system, worked against absolutism, traditionalism, and institutionalized religion, and were in favor of the emancipation of women and Jews. They were generally in support of democracy and republicanism. However, in comparison with other radicals, many of the Young Hegelians were moderate in their calls for change. In fact, several of them were *pro*-Prussia, *pro*-state, and even *pro*-monarchy for a significant amount of time before advocating more revolutionary ideas. However, it is important to recognize that, at the height of their critical phase, they nonetheless constituted a formidable voice of resistance in their opposition to theocracy, autocracy, and aristocracy. Happily accepting epithets like “heretics,” their atheist humanism was defiantly and confidently progressive.

The Epigones

A Hegelian discipleship did not come into existence until after 1816 when Hegel accepted a post at the University of Heidelberg. However, before his appointment in 1818 to the University of Berlin, Hegel was largely peripheral, both geographically (after he left Jena, which was devastated in the Battle of Jena in 1806, for Bamberg, Nuremberg, and eventually Heidelberg) and intellectually, to German academic life. Romantic philosophy

²⁷³ However, after his break with Marx, whom Weitling had met in 1846, he and his followers were excluded from the group.

dominated the period: Major figures like F.W.J. Schelling (with whom Hegel and Friedrich Hölderlin had studied in Tübingen), August Wilhelm von Schlegel, and Friedrich Schleiermacher, as well as lesser-known thinkers such as Franz von Baader and Karl Windischmann constituted the German reaction to the Enlightenment.²⁷⁴ Hegel's critique of Kant, on the other hand, was always a radicalization of the basic proposition of the Enlightenment: that objective knowledge was not only possible but superior to belief.²⁷⁵ To that, Hegel added that reason was by definition limitless and that there was no truth forever beyond the grasp of mind.²⁷⁶ This the Romantics disputed. But despite the asymmetry between Hegel's ideas and the *Zeitgeist*, he had enough sympathizers even among his adversaries, who shared his notion (without perhaps being altogether aware of its implications) that a more sober approach to metaphysics and a new emphasis on rigor was needed, to allow him to obtain Fichte's chair in Berlin.²⁷⁷

Once in Berlin, Hegel gained considerable prestige and achieved popularity especially with the younger generation of students. Berlin became the center of Hegelianism in the decades to follow. Not only was the Young Hegelian group *Die Freien* based in Berlin, the University of Berlin was also the training ground for Bruno and Edgar Bauer, Cieszkowski, Feuerbach, Stirner, Marx, and Engels, who had all

²⁷⁴ Others were, for example, Joseph Görres, G. H. von Schubert, Henrik Steffens, and Ernst Moritz Arndt.

²⁷⁵ As I have tried to show, this link between Hegel and the Enlightenment was always of a contradictory nature. Thus, Peter Cornehl states, "Die bisherigen Arbeiten über die Hegelsche Schule krankten daran, daß Hegel und die Hegelianer zu isoliert behandelt worden sind. Die Problematik der hegelianischen Religionsphilosophie kann jedoch gar nicht voll erfaßt werden, wenn man sie nicht – in Anknüpfung und Widerspruch – in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der *Aufklärung* sieht" (*Die Zukunft der Versöhnung: Eschatologie und Emanzipation in der Aufklärung, bei Hegel und in der Hegelschen Schule* [Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971]).

²⁷⁶ For a dated but useful representation of Hegel's critique of Kant's "philosophy of *Sollen*," see Nicholas Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), specifically chapter 10 "Hegel: Vernunft versus *Sollen*," 143-158.

²⁷⁷ Fichte had died in 1814, and his position had remained vacant until Hegel was appointed to it four years later. His appointment was made possible by Altenstein and was also supported by Friedrich Schleiermacher and Friedrich Creuzer, as well as Marheineke and Daub who were to become dedicated Hegelians.

studied philosophy there. Furthermore, the Hegelian Society for Scientific Criticism was founded in Berlin. Outside Berlin, Hegelians were present at several academic centers. There was Daub in Heidelberg, Hinrichs in Breslau and Halle (where he was joined by Leo and Rosenkranz), Kapp in Erlangen, Gabler in Bayreuth. Halle became significant with Leo, Johann Georg Musmann, Eiselen, Rosenkranz, Theodor Echtermeyer. Their students were Ruge, Friedrich Richter, Julius Schaller, and Moritz Besser. Isaak Rust and Feuerbach were in Erlangen. The southern Hegelians were mostly in Tübingen with Strauß and Friedrich Theodor Vischer.

It was not until after Hegel's death that his philosophy became caught in a tug of war where each side was conscripting Hegel for different purposes; before that, there was a remarkable homogeneity among Hegel's disciples. As Hegel established himself among contemporary philosophers, he also became more suspect in the eyes of the reactionaries. However, at that point, Hegelians had already made their way into the system and attained relatively secure positions vis-à-vis the restored *ancien régime*. This period in the development of Hegelian thought is usually called "Old Hegelianism." The Old Hegelians were generally more conservative than the so-called Young Hegelians. However, not much work has been done on the first group of Hegel's disciples, a circumstance that may be partially be a result of Karl Löwith's claim that "[f]or the historical movement of the nineteenth century they [the Old Hegelians] are without significance."²⁷⁸ While it is true that this first phase of the Hegelian school was eventually displaced, it would be incorrect to simply dismiss all Old Hegelians as reactionary and accomodationist. In fact, a few of the Old Hegelians were in fact Left Hegelians who were quite critical and endeavored to develop the negative aspect of Hegel's philosophy.

²⁷⁸ Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 54.

Because of this, the conventional equation between “Old” and “Right” Hegelianism is somewhat problematic. John Edward Toews’ book *Hegelianism* is premised on the two-fold argument that the distinction between “Right” and “Left” Hegelianism is more accurate than the division between “Old” and “Young” and that all of these categories, since they refer to a specific politics, have to be put in their historical context. Toews challenges the notion that all of the Old Hegelianism was as “Right” as its most conservative arm and argues that it is much more useful to view the distinction between “Right” and “Left” not as equivalent to the distinction between “Old” and “Young” but rather as a division that marked Hegelianism from the get-go – even though the disagreements among the Old Hegelians, albeit clearly present, were not particularly visible beneath the veneer of apparent unity, and were thus not thought to be of critical importance. Another reason why Toews objects to the distinction between “Old” and “Young” is because it is misleading in that it suggests a clearly structured generational conflict, which is problematic since Rosenkranz, Erdmann, and Schaller belonged to the same age group as Strauß, Bauer, Feuerbach, Ruge, Vischer, and Stirner. Toews suggests that when speaking of Hegelianism during the Restoration, we should use the terms “accommodationist,” “reformist,” and “revolutionary.”²⁷⁹

Toews argues further that historical work on the end of Hegelianism has focused exclusively on the Young Hegelians and has ignored the rest who do not neatly fit into categories and who, constituting the moderate position of the “Center,” actually comprised the majority of Hegelian disciples as late as the late 1830s and early 1840s.²⁸⁰ Toews insists that more attention be paid to the moderate Hegelians, the Center,

²⁷⁹ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 205.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 204-6.

especially since, according to him, it was these reformist Hegelians, rather than the radical Young Hegelians, who were the main object of attacks from the conservative Hegelian camp and the anti-Hegelian conservatives alike. Toews seems to want to make a case for the expansion of the category of “Left Hegelianism” perhaps under the name “New Hegelianism”; however, he also recognizes that there was something rather very new about “Young Hegelianism,” which was the claim that Hegel’s philosophy needed not only to be interpreted correctly and promoted but rather revised and freed from the vestiges of an old metaphysics.

What is perhaps most noticeable about the early Hegelianism was the level at which it had institutionalized itself. Toews describes this phenomenon well when he says,

The generation of students who attended the University of Berlin in the mid and late 1820s encountered what one might justifiably call a Hegelian “establishment,” consisting of Hegel, Schulze, Marheineke, Henning, and to a lesser extent Gans and Förster, whose approval and support were necessary for acceptance into the inner “magic circle” of the school and, in an increasing number of cases, for appointments or promotions within the Prussian educational system. . . . The sympathy and support of patrons of literature and the arts . . . made Hegelianism an extremely important, if not completely dominating, presence in the Berlin literary world and general cultural scene.²⁸¹

This institutionalization effectively protected the Old Hegelians from reactionary attacks and ensured its influence. Hence, Hegelianism’s status at the center of academic life in the 1820’s was relatively unchallenged and only began to wane in the course of the 30’s when the unity among Hegelians broke up, and the reformist Hegelian camp, spurred on by the liberal revolutions, began seriously to challenge the moderate to conservative camp, who, up until then, that is throughout the decade of the 20’s, had controlled the school.²⁸²

²⁸¹ Ibid., 86.

²⁸² Ibid., 151.

The Right Hegelians for the most part elaborated the relation (rather than the contradiction) between orthodox Christianity and Hegelian philosophy, including those thinkers who did not entirely share the worldview of the traditionalists. The Old Hegelian Karl Rosenkranz, for example, famously defined the role of Hegel's disciples as that of "epigones," advocating a "position of positive quietism"²⁸³ in the heated political struggles of the time. While his outlook was in fact fairly liberal,²⁸⁴ making him effectively a "Center Hegelian," he was motivated by a similar accommodationist impulse as the conservative Hegelians Karl Daub, Philipp Marheineke, and Karl Göschel.²⁸⁵ True to the Idealist tradition, Rosenkranz repeated the Hegelian mantra that history was spirit giving itself being, that it was the product of spirit's creative self-activity. Unlike his more radical friend and student Friedrich Richter²⁸⁶, he aimed to disclose once again the identity in content of religion and philosophy, arguing that a theological science could distinguish between essence (concept) and appearance (representation) while demonstrating their unity.

In some ways, the Right Hegelians were definitely conservative, i.e. Christian, in their interpretation of Hegel. They conceived of Hegel's ideas as divine inspiration and of

²⁸³ Cited in McLellan, *The Young Hegelians*, 6.

²⁸⁴ Toews calls Rosenkranz and those like him the "new accommodationists" to indicate the distance between them and the "old accommodationists" (*Hegelianism*, 155-6.) Löwith describes Rosenkranz as the "most liberal of all the Old Hegelians," but he argues that Rosenkranz and the more conservative Old Hegelians were the ones to truly preserve Hegelian philosophy after his death (*From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 54), the assumption being that Right Hegelianism was the true Hegelianism. The fact that Löwith believes that *not* being "inclined toward radical innovation" meant to promote the essential Hegel shows that he privileges, and perhaps even sympathizes with, the reactionary Hegel over against the revolutionary Hegel, a basic disposition at odds with the perspective defended here.

²⁸⁵ Other, lesser-known figures among the Old Hegelians were, for instance, Gustav Asverus, Moses Moser, and Immanuel Wohlwill. Younger representatives were philosophers Kuno Fischer and Rudolf Haym. More moderate were men like the Benary brothers Franz Ferdinand and Karl Albert Agathon Agathon. Somewhat more prominent were Heinrich Gustav Hotho, Julius Schaller and Johann Eduard Erdmann, the historian whose 1866 two-volume *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Zürich: Deutsch-Schweizerische Verlagsanstalt, 1930) includes a discussion of Hegelianism.

²⁸⁶ Richter himself was actually closer to the Young Hegelians Cieszkowski and Heß than to the Old Hegelians. (See my discussion below.)

their own conversion to Hegel's ideas as a kind of spiritual rebirth. Rosenkranz, in an attempt to express what it was that united the first generation of Hegelians, explained that it was a sense that God and his creation were joined together so closely as to eradicate the difference. Egoism was viewed as a sin, and it seems that for these philosophers, Hegelianism was the message of a secularized form of the imperative "Love thy Neighbor." At the same time, the Old Hegelians could be very radical in their assertions of the importance of secular reality. Again, Rosenkranz, for instance, chided Young Hegelian Feuerbach for not attempting the study of the concrete reality of nature or the state and for remaining an "abstract theologian" who uses reality only to provide examples. In some ways, then, the Old Hegelians shared some basic concerns with the Young Hegelians and can be seen to have held the very ideas that were to play such an important role for the Hegelian Left. A case in point is Rosenkranz's argument that we must interpret Hegel's "spirit" as "mankind."²⁸⁷

With a sense for subtlety thus introduced, it is prudent to distinguish between those Old Hegelians who stood politically on the far right end of the spectrum, the "Old Right Hegelians," and those who taught a more leftist Hegel, or who may be termed the "Old Left Hegelians," who laid the groundwork for the humanist universalism later developed by the Young Hegelians. Johannes Schulze, who became Altenstein's right hand and therefore figured prominently in Hegelianism's conciliatory move towards the Prussian government and in providing institutional security for the Old Hegelians belonged to the first group. So did Leopold Henning and Friedrich Christoph Förster, who had both been soldiers in the Napoleonic Wars and who advanced a very accommodationist reading of Hegel, seeing very little difference between revealed religion

²⁸⁷ Cited in Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 55-8.

and Hegel's secularized spiritualism. Aside from Heinrich Leo and the early Bruno Bauer, both of whom were also very conservative,²⁸⁸ there was a powerful conservative force consisting of the Christian apologetics Göschel, Kasimir Conradi, and Isaak Rust. They all became even more reactionary with the eventual dissolution of the Hegelian School. Whereas Hegel had clearly relegated religion to an inferior stage in the development of the universal spirit, these theologians saw religion and philosophy as merely two different expressions (though one more practical and the other more theoretical) of the same: man's unity with God. Hegel may have stressed the identity of content and difference of form, but the conservative Christians conveniently forgot about the latter, accentuating only the former.

However, not all Old Hegelians were conservative. Eduard Gans and Friedrich Wilhelm Carové, for example, while also part of the generation of epigones, contributed significantly to the future crystallization of a distinctly left Hegelianism. Whereas Schulze, Henning, Förster, and Leo were highly nationalistic and thus intent on appropriating Hegelianism for the purpose of reinvigorating the German *Volksgemeinschaft* (their term²⁸⁹), Gans and Carové were much more critical-universalist and class-conscious and therefore intellectually closer to Heß, Ruge, Feuerbach, and Marx than to their reactionary fellow Old Hegelians. Further, there were others who pushed the envelope of the critical intent in Hegel's concept of history, albeit in different directions. Hermann Friedrich Wilhelm Hinrichs, for example, became concerned with what he perceived as the persisting gap between ideal and real. Christian Erhard Kapp, on

²⁸⁸ The list can be expanded to include also Hegel's successor Georg Andreas Gabler.

²⁸⁹ This term, which is generally associated today mainly with Nationalist Socialism, was already fairly prevalent in 1900. In particular, it was used by conservative and Christian groups that sought to overcome modern, individualistic, utilitarian, and conflict-ridden "society" with a harmonious "community."

the other hand, believed that ideal and real had in fact been united but that religion needed to completely give way to science.

Many of the Old Hegelians, as comfortable as they were in their academic positions, were unwilling to criticize the state of affairs in Prussia and the rest of Germany. In fact, it seems reasonable to attribute the Right Hegelians' conservative stance to the degree to which they were deeply enmeshed with the political apparatus. (Another cause for the arrangement between state and conservative Hegelians was Prussia's increasing concern to contain the anti-statist, quasi-anarchist tendencies of ultra-conservative Romanticism, which many Hegelians opposed also.) The close relationship between Hegel and Schulze, who had taken on the reformation of the German system of higher education, was emblematic of the relatively smooth fit between Prussian policy and Hegelian philosophy. Henning and Förster were both convinced that God's Kingdom on Earth had already arrived and that philosophy's role consisted mainly in explicating this happy situation. Henning rejected any reform proposal and insisted dogmatically on the identity of the *is* and the *ought*. Förster, too, once he had been given a prestigious position with the official Prussian newspaper, became an adamant defender of the Hegelian doctrine that the final stage of the self-realization of the Absolute was the recognition of the existing *status quo*.

But, as I noted, there were also those who were less inclined to identify their philosophy with Restorationist Prussian politics. For Gans and Carové, and for Leo as well, the historical present was not the finished product of the incarnate Spirit but rather another point of departure, another plane that had to be transcended. Their differences with extreme accommodationist Hegelianism, however, were not considerable enough to

threaten the general unity of the Hegelians. But if Leo, Gans, and Carové have all shared the sense that the contemporary arrangement of political and social structures was not perfect, but their criticism was quite differently motivated. Leo's objections to the order of things in Prussia were essentially conservative, which is why he must be considered a Right Hegelian. Specifically, his critique of bureaucratic absolutism was based on the individual's freedom from all state intervention, and his idea of progress rested on a belief that a quasi-feudal hierarchical social system was the way of the future. Leo's extremely checkered career turned him from a young populist Teutonist and Anti-Semitic rebel into a Right Hegelian and finally into an arch-conservative anti-Hegelian and Pietist. He and Rust had already become rabidly anti-critical by the time Göschel dropped Hegelian theory from his intellectual repertoire. Both Leo and Rust became recognized spokesmen for the neo-orthodox Pietist Fundamentalism.

Matters were different with Gans. He was a Jew whose academic ambitions were repeatedly frustrated until he converted to Christianity. He did much to radicalize Hegelian philosophy. Toews even goes so far as to claim that Gans became the "godfather" of the critical Hegelianism of the 1830s.²⁹⁰ Gans emphasized the Hegelian notion of the dynamic nature of history, maintaining that the existing reality was *in the process* of becoming rational. He also introduced to Hegelian constitutional theory the democratic idea of the need of an official opposition and argued in favor of modern electoral policies. Like Leo, he did not share Hegel's insistence on the state's unlimited authority, especially when it came to its influence over the university, but his belief in individual rights was not informed by a proposal to return to the regionalism of German

²⁹⁰ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 228. Toews insists, however, that Gans was not a revolutionary, that he remained reformist throughout, and that despite his recognition of the inadequacies of liberalism he opposed radical change, opting instead for conflict solution through integration and cultural education (ibid., 229).

Kleinstaaterei; rather, he advocated making the individual in general (not just the elite) the political subject of the centralized state.

Further to the left still was Carové, who not only approved of the 1830s revolutions, as did Gans, in manifest contrast with Hegel himself, but took Gans's reformism a step further, calling for a philosophy of "real life," a turn away from speculation, and a politicized critical Hegelianism. While at first, he placed much hope in the concrete activities of *Burschenschaften*, whom he tried in vain to convince of the importance of ethnic integration, his later work became increasingly utopian. Eventually, he maintained that the state was not the ultimate embodiment of reason and shifted to a kind of theory of human brotherhood not too unlike Feuerbach's. Despite the fact that he has been called a representative of the moderate Hegelians and the fact that he may not have considered himself a Hegelian at all,²⁹¹ Carové can therefore be considered the paradigmatic exponent of the Hegelian Old Left.

Even though Carové, as well as Richter and Cieszkowski, rejected the Young Hegelian movement after 1840, he was convinced that the establishment of God's Kingdom on Earth was not too far off in the future but that it had definitely not arrived yet. He described the present as a time of polarity and failure, rather than unity and harmony, and emphasized the limitations of the existing political and social arrangement. Toews puts it like this: "The description of the present as an age of bifurcation implied

²⁹¹ It is possible that, like Heß, Carové did not think of himself as a Hegelian and that, as Warren Breckman suggests, it is more appropriate (especially also because of their peripheral status in relation to academe), to refer to them, and also to Richter, as "fellow travelers" in the way Heine was one (*Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* [Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 9). In a similar vein, Heinz and Ingrid Pepperle insist that Cieszkowski was not part of the Young Hegelian group (22). Carové's negative views of conservative and moderate Hegelians were also more implicit than explicit, and his ideas were similar to those of Cieszkowski (Michelet's student and friend) and Richter (Rosenkranz's student and friend), both of whom were more directly involved with the School and perceived their own contributions to be contributions to post-Hegelian philosophy.

and produced a significant revision of the Hegelian philosophy of history. The era of synthesis and reconciliation was displaced from the present into the future, and the whole Christian-German era was transformed into a mere transitional and preparatory stage in mankind's salvational history."²⁹² Having said that, I emphasize once more that the intellectual developments of the individual thinkers cannot be contained in one category only because these individuals' work was neither stable nor linear. Marheineke, for example, wavered considerably and at times appeared more moderate than right, while Gans was counted among the Right Hegelians by Strauß when in fact, being one of Germany's most outspoken proponents of Saint-Simonism, he was much more leftist than the moderates.

On the other hand, it is possible to distinguish a group who were neither radical nor particularly conservative, and consistently so. They have been referred to as the "Hegelians of the Center" and included, among others, Rosenkranz and Karl Ludwig Michelet. Strauß's teacher Ferdinand Christian Baur and the more liberal Karl Theodor Bayrhammer are further worthy of being mentioned. A number of these politically moderate followers of Hegel's philosophy worked, from 1832 to 1842, on the publication of the complete works of Hegel and founded the "Berlin Philosophical Society" in 1845. They were largely attempting to find a middle ground between the right and the left and to mediate between the hostile camps. But if their position was rather clearly delineated from that of their conservative counterparts, this difference has subsequently been obscured. This is due in part to the fact they did not neatly fit into the polarized picture that juxtaposes the Young Hegelians with the rest.

²⁹² Toews, *Hegelianism*, 239.

Despite the moderate and leftist elements, however, much of the Old Hegelianism was strictly theological. Daub and Marheineke were the foremost representatives of speculative Protestant theology. Former Schellingians, Daub and Marheineke “converted” to Hegel and worked on squaring orthodox religion with Hegel’s absolute spirit, a project which, as one might expect, was a rather precarious maneuver. Both believed that Hegelian science and religious faith could indeed be bridged, namely by interpreting biblical events as representations of the activity of the universal spirit. As Toews points out, the paradoxical nature of this synthesis did not appear to them. Marheineke was not even plagued with doubts as Daub was. In light of this, Toews remarks,

In Marheineke’s writings the critical, negative Moment that marked the transition from representation to concept, the death of God that preceded his resurrection as spirit, was given very little emphasis. The doctrine of the reconciliation of faith and reason, religion and philosophy, became the basis for an uncritical affirmation of the truth of the Christian representations. Marheineke experienced no difficulty in reconciling his Hegelian convictions with his vocation as a Christian theologian, preacher, and churchman. In his academic lectures and scholarly writings he translated the Christian representations into conceptual form; in his sermons and popular religious writings he continued to use the traditional language of the representations. He perceived his actions not as a hypocritical conformity to appearances, but as an authentic expression of his conviction that religious faith and Hegelian philosophy were merely different forms [sic.] of appropriating the same Christian truth.²⁹³

“Bibling their Hegel”²⁹⁴ with great determination, these Christian Hegelians, together with their more political colleagues, were squeezed between the emerging Left and the traditional anti-Hegelian Right away from the former and towards the latter. In an increasingly explosive atmosphere, many of the conservative Hegelians ended up

²⁹³ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 149.

²⁹⁴ I would maintain that the nineteenth-century saying that the Young Hegelians “Hegeled their bible and babled their Hegel” (cited in Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 52) is more appropriate with respect to the Old Hegelians because they were unable to patch up the contradictions between the concept of immanence and that of the God of the Gospels.

breaking completely with their erstwhile Hegelianism and thus were soaked up by the new Christian consensus. Karl Göschel, for instance, had originally come to Hegel's defense with his 1829 *Aphorismen über Nichtwissen und absolutes Wissen* but ended up repudiating his Hegelian past and returned to an ultra-conservative Pietism. Like Göschel, the most conservative members of the Old Hegelians performed a complete retreat from the secularizing and materialist impulse that had been central to the founding moment of Hegel's philosophy. Partially in response to this, the Center Hegelians found themselves aligned more closely with the Hegelian Left.

One can argue, therefore, that the political pressure on the Hegelians proved to be a test for how willing they were to develop Hegel's radical ideas. Threatened with persecution, many who had been moderate became conservative. Many who had been conservative abandoned Hegel altogether. Some, however, stayed the course and became more vocal in their defense of a critical Hegelianism. Another interpretation of the increasing polarization is that the social changes themselves occasioned a stronger resistance in the sense that a more conservative climate made the entire intellectual spectrum shift to the left. Whatever the cause, it becomes clear that Marx and Engels's own development was wrapped up in these events, and their (forced) detachment from academic philosophy was as much as reason for their turn towards the working class as were their theoretical and political activities and engagement with communism.

As a significant part of the Old Hegelian Right wound up denouncing Hegelian philosophy, the Old Hegelian Left prepared the ground for the New Hegelian Left. Any discussion of Marx's departure from Hegel cannot disregard the fact that the Old Left already developed Hegel's idea of the necessity and inevitability of the transformation of

the existing order of things and that it even took Hegel to task for remaining too ensconced in abstract theory. In other words, Marx's critique of metaphysical idealism as incapable of grasping real sensuous practice emerged out of a radical commentary on, and critical engagement with, the speculative aspects of Hegelian philosophy. Of course, when the old Left spoke of a more "realist" interpretation of Hegel, it had in mind a humanity-centered true religion, and when it spoke of the transcendence of the present, it imagined the future as the culmination of the divinization of humankind.²⁹⁵ But this first group of Left Hegelians, such as Richter, Carové, and August Cieszkowski, radicalized the idea of a union of faith and reason under the aegis of the latter and constructed a thoroughly immanentist framework for reading Hegel, which was to become the starting point for the Young Hegelians.

At about the same time when Schelling's intellectual career evinced an almost 180 degree turn towards an irrationalist mysticism, the Hegelian Left worked to create a secularized Hegelian idealism. Richter's "purity of the deed" and especially Cieszkowski's "absolute activity," which expressed the imperative of supplementing knowledge with transformative action and has therefore been described as an early form of Marx's "language of real life," were centrally about the unity of theory and practice.

²⁹⁵ According to Toews,

[i]t was this interpretation of the past, present, and future in terms of the dialectical relationship between God and man, the transcendent and the immanent, that made the old Left Hegelians *old* Hegelians. They interpreted the evolution of mankind as a "sacred" history, as the self-revelation of God through the divinization of man, as the dramatic story of the *reconciliation* between the divine and the human. Psychological and social bifurcation was perceived as a *manifestation* of the estrangement of man from God; it could be resolved only by a religious transformation that would overcome [sic.] the estrangement. . . . [Therefore, t]o criticize thinkers like Cieszkowski for their failure to define a specific historical group as the agent of the hoped-for cultural transformation is thus to misunderstand or reject the basic premise of their position. Mere 'finite' social, political, or pedagogical activity could never transform the world in the radical fashion they envisioned. History was not a finite secular process of human self-realization, but the sacred process of God's self-actualization in man. (*Hegelianism*, 241)

Of course, their insistent effort to continue to invest human history with otherworldly meaning is precisely what made them conservatives, not radicals, *in the eyes* of the youngest generation of Left Hegelians.

Cieszkowski also coined the term that is now so firmly associated with Marx, “praxis,” and criticized Fourier for being utopian and for conceiving the future in *a priori* terms. In fact, the extent to which Cieszkowski held proto-Young Hegelian and Marxian ideas has McLellan maintaining that his “philosophy of action was as prophetic for the Young Hegelians in politics as Strauß’s book had been in religion . . . [and that] it was Cieszkowski who gave the first impetus to the process of swift secularisation that set in among the Young Hegelians in the next few years.”²⁹⁶

As indicated, the Old Hegelianism, and specifically the Old Hegelian Right, became less and less able to deflect the conflict between orthodox theologians and Hegelians. Hegel’s ambivalent stance vis-à-vis the state and religion began to look increasingly problematic to a number of his followers who saw themselves face to face not only with a general spiritualist awakening initiated by the aristocracy²⁹⁷ and attendant cultural backlash, but also with a progressively absolutist and repressive regime. The Reactionary government of Friedrich Wilhelm III, who in 1797 had succeeded his more tolerant father Friedrich II on the throne, was determined to reinstall order, morality, and religiosity in government and constituency. The return to religious traditionalism and Lutheran dogma in Prussia and Germany was hence accompanied by press censorship, a

²⁹⁶ McLellan, *The Young Hegelians*, 11. Similarly, Stepelevich maintains that “Cieszkowski’s *Prolegomena to Historiosophy* completely re-oriented Hegelianism, transforming it from a doctrine considered to be merely retrospective and theoretical into a program of fundamental social change” (*The Young Hegelians*, 55).

²⁹⁷ Toews calls it a “revival from above” (Toews, 245). He explicates further that this new aristocratic pietism was even more powerful than the traditional pietism (like that of August Neander, who had effected the banning of the writings of Young Germany) and Schleiermachian theology taken together because its political power grew on account of its increasing monopoly on the bureaucratic and judicial apparatus and its backing by the crown prince. Its main advocates, aside from Ernst Hengstenberg, Friedrich August von Tholuck, and Johannes Wichern in Berlin, were Adolf von Harless, Theodor Löhe, Johannes Hofmann, and Friedrich Julius Stahl in Bavaria, and Ludwig Hofacker, Wilhelm Hofacker, Sixt Kapff, Albert Knapp, Christoph Gottlieb Barth, and Wilhelm Hoffmann in Württemberg. They were staunchly anti-rationalist, anti-dogmatic, and personalist. Their evangelism preached blind obedience to a transcendent authority and blind faith in the literal truth of the Bible, especially man’s salvation in the next life. It was a neo-orthodox revivalism that sought to return to Lutheran principles.

tight control of the universities, and a clamping down on liberal and secularist dissidents. This context illustrates the risk that intellectuals had to accept when they decided to deviate from the official consensus. Hegel himself was not willing to jeopardize his status by going against the will of the state.

There was a sudden onset and quick intensification of a strong Anti-Hegelian Reaction, which, fueled by the Protestant New Pietism (which was also and perhaps primarily the attempt of the ecclesiastical establishment to reaffirm the links between church and state) and coupled with the event of the official union of the Lutheran and the Calvinist church in 1822, was subsequently orchestrated by a number of conservative theologians or politically influential Christians like Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg and Friedrich August Gottreu von Tholuck,²⁹⁸ Ernst Ludwig von Gerlach, Adolf Le Coq, and Johann Heinrich Wichern. Against this background, Hegelianism became a serious challenge to the *Biedermeier* in Germany²⁹⁹ Insofar as it constituted another important voice of discontent during the *Vormärz* (Pre-March), the period between 1815 and 1848. To his supporters, Hegel was the thinker of the Absolute, an omen of a new this-worldliness; to his foes, who were undoubtedly playing a winning hand in the struggle for influence, Hegel was the embodiment of the dangers of Enlightenment excess -- the height of blasphemy and human arrogance. Hegel's case for a dialectical science of society was reviled by orthodox theists, pietists, and positivists alike, and it was defended by Right and Left Hegelians alike. This historical appraisal allows us to see the common

²⁹⁸ Tholuck was a vigorously anti-rationalist theologian in Halle who, in 1827, founded the *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung für das protestantische Deutschland*, which was to become the principle organ for the advocacy of extreme Pietist views.

²⁹⁹ The *Biedermeier* era in German history is equivalent to the *Vormärz* period (1815-1848). As opposed to the term *Vormärz*, however, which signifies primarily the political “*Aufbruchsstimmung*” (literally “atmosphere of departure”) that lead up to the Revolution of 1848, the term *Biedermeier* has a more immediately aesthetic meaning, connoting the quiet, conservative, and private petty-bourgeois cultural climate of the Restoration.

commitments of the different schools of Hegelian thought and enables us to analyze these commitments despite fundamental differences. It is these commonalities that I wish to highlight here in order to show that the Hegelian Left was a movement borne of the social and political climate in Germany. Marx's case for a materialist science of history was not an aberration in the dialectical tradition but a key rallying point that organized the Hegelian resistance at the time.

However, I have also argued that the Hegelian Right had more in common with the conservative Pietists than their revolutionary fellow Hegelians. A different perspective is advanced by Warren Breckman, who does not accentuate the conflict within, and the eventual dissolution of, the Hegelian School. Rather, he treats the entire Hegelian School as an entity that was unified against a shared enemy. He argues convincingly that the disagreements and finally the split between the "Old" and the "Young" Hegelians should not distract us from a more profound antagonism, namely that between the Hegelians and the anti-Hegelian defenders of Christian orthodoxy. In the present discussion, Breckman's view is indeed a useful one because it allows us to consider that being a Hegelian ("Old" or "Young") was increasingly associated with a subversive politics and made its advocates tremendously vulnerable, both professionally and personally. After all, it was the Anti-Hegelians who, starting in the 1820s, catapulted themselves into positions of power, forcing Hegelians out of their academic posts or permanently preventing them from ever even entering the university.

Several of the first-generation Young Hegelians were ousted by a hostile faculty. Strauß was one example. Despite his subsequent attempts to mollify his detractors after the momentous publication of his book, Strauß was removed from the University of

Tübingen. Similarly, Ruge lost his teaching post in Halle. Feuerbach, having been a *Privatdozent* in Erlangen, had to permanently give up his hopes of getting a position anywhere after the uproar caused by the discovery that he was the author of *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*. Finally, Bauer was fired from the University of Bonn just shortly after his appointment, having his teaching license (*licentia docendi*) rescinded. Others never entertained any hopes of securing an academic position. Marx himself may have hoped initially that Bauer could help him find a job at the university, but after Bauer's dismissal, he relinquished any such notions. Stepelevich puts it succinctly when he says that only few of the Young Hegelians escaped the repression and that a "long series of imprisonments, exiles, impoverishments and rejection . . . marked their collective careers."³⁰⁰ One exception was the Polish aristocrat Cieszkowski, who managed to remain untouched by the repressive apparatus.

However, it was not only the Young Hegelians who lost their jobs and job prospects. Many of the Old Hegelians had to withstand difficulties also. Daub, for example, had to give up his position at Marburg in 1794 due to a book of sermons in which he had claimed that Christ and the idea of immortality were postulates of practical reason. Another moderate Hegelian who was suspended as professor of philosophy was Bayrhofer at Marburg. This shows that in spite of their theoretical differences, the Hegelians were viewed by the establishment as united intellectual and political formation and threat. In a way, then, it was the Reaction's fear, and cruel subjugation, of Hegel's thought that gave early nineteenth-century Hegelian critical theory its historically significant force as a radical voice.

³⁰⁰ Stepelevich, *The Young Hegelians*, 9.

After Hegel's death in 1831, and especially in the late 30's and early 40's, the situation went from bad to worse for the Young Hegelians. The chair at the University of Berlin was occupied again in 1835 by the conservative Hegelian Georg Andreas Gabler³⁰¹, whom Toews dubs "the most unoriginal, uncritical, and colorless of Hegelian exegetes."³⁰² Hegelians of all shades were viewed with increased suspicion in Fürst Metternich's Germany and were subjected to harassment and persecution everywhere. Hegelianism, both right and left, was perceived as revolutionary from the vantage point of the religious establishment. Even the works of moderates and conservative Hegelians, such as F.C. Baur's *The Christian Gnosis* (1835) and Wilhelm Vatke's *The Religion of the Old Testament* (also 1835) were considered dangerous, and the founding of the "Tübingen School" (a group of theologians in Tübingen) did not please the authorities.³⁰³

In light of all this, it becomes understandable why what now appear like tame treatises on religion were so explosive and cannot but be considered courageous acts. Breckman corroborates this interpretation when he says that "[t]he 1820s are often presented as years of ascendancy for Hegelianism among German intellectuals, but much would be lost to our understanding of the intellectual history of the early nineteenth century if we neglected the fact that outside the circle of Hegel's supporters, Hegelianism faced opposition from a wide variety of camps."³⁰⁴ Further, Breckman describes the all-encompassing scope of the opposing powers and the utterly beleaguered situation of the

³⁰¹ Incidentally, Gabler had been the chair of the Gymnasium that Max Stirner attended as a child. Gabler was also one in the initial group of about six who formed Hegel's first discipleship: While in Jena, at around 1805, Hegel had gathered a few student-followers around him; they included Gabler, Hermann Suthmeyer, Christian Zellmann (who died early), Karl Friedrich Bachmann, Christian F. Lange, and the Dutch student Peter Gabriel van Ghert. Van Ghert was the only one who remained throughout an outspoken Hegelian and introduced Hegel's thought to the Netherlands. Bachmann advocated for his former teacher's ideas for a while before becoming a Schellingian.

³⁰² Toews, *Hegelianism*, 204.

³⁰³ There were three Tübingen Schools, but the one relevant here, the "younger Tübingen School," revolved around Baur and supported critical work on the New Testament.

³⁰⁴ Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins*, 20.

Hegelian camp when he lists the various spokespersons of the new, ultra-religious accord:

In such a climate, a philosophy associated, whether rightly or wrongly, with the Promethean ideals of Romanticism, with the divinization of humanity, with freedom and individual self-determination, provoked reactions from across the spectrum of opinion. Theological opponents of Hegel's philosophy of religion ranged from the neo-orthodox Protestant circle of the *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, edited by Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, to Pietists like Friedrich August Tholuck and Julius Müller, to the theological rationalists Heinrich Paulus, Julius Röhr, Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, and the circle of the *Allgemeine Kirchenzeitung*. Catholic theologians also expressed opposition.³⁰⁵

The philosophical (rather than the straightforwardly theological or Pietist) Anti-Hegelian opposition was headed by the "speculative theists" I.H. Fichte (son of Johann Gottlieb Fichte), C.H. Weiße, the so-called "positive philosophy" of F.W.J. Schelling, and the political theology of Friedrich Julius Stahl.

In contrast to the conservative perception, Hegel was not a Romantic. In fact, he himself had initiated a direct confrontation with the Romantics, as is evinced in his thoroughgoing attacks on the national-cultural "Historical School of Law."³⁰⁶ The proponents of this school of thought argued against natural law theory and maintained that law was specific to a particular people, a "folk," its habits, and its culture. According to their Romantic interpretation of legal history, law has nothing to do with reason because it is an organic entity, like language and norms, that "grows" with the changing

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 22.

³⁰⁶ The Historical School of Law (*Historische Rechtsschule* or *Geschichtliche Schule der Rechtswissenschaft*) is sometimes referred to as the Historical School of Jurists, the Historical School of Jurisprudence, the Historical School of Legal Philosophy, or the German Historical School. It was founded by German jurist Gustav von Hugo and dominated by Friedrich Karl von Savigny, also a famous jurist and brother-in-law to Clemens Brentano and Bettina and Achim von Arnim. Other representatives of this school included thinkers as different as Karl Ludwig von Haller (extremely conservative spokesman for the "Restoration," a term which was applied to the post-1815/*Wiener Kongreß* period after Haller's book *Restauration der Staatswissenschaften*, 1816) and Jakob Friedrich Fries (liberal nationalist, *Burschenschaften* sympathizer, and Kantian philosopher who tried to give Kant's philosophy an anthropological basis). In 1815, Savigny, together with Karl Friedrich Eichhorn, founded the *Zeitschrift für geschichtliche Rechtswissenschaft*, which became the main forum for the views of the Historical School.

practical needs of a people (its *Volksgeist*) and therefore cannot be “artificially” superimposed by an external authority. It was in many ways a recovery of Roman Law. The fact that Hegel engaged in extensive debates against its followers illustrates the profoundly anti-metaphysical *qua* emotionalist of Hegel’s philosophy.

What is interesting about the course of the debate between Hegel and the Historical School is that the different arguments converged on how to conceive a new realist philosophy. In point of fact, the counter-discourse to post-Kantian idealism was called “realism” by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who in the famous *Pantheismusstreit* maintained that the objective particularity and the finite character of all natural entities was proof for the reality of an external sovereign God, the unconditioned source of all conditions.³⁰⁷ In contrast, Schleiermacher, poet Friedrich Hölderlin, the young Schelling, and of course Hegel were intent on negating Kant’s dualist separation of noumena and phenomena by maintaining that consciousness, experience, intuition, or mind on the one hand and reality on the other were equivalent. It is immediately apparent that, despite his emphasis on objective existence, Jacobi’s approach was far less “realist” than the Idealists’ panlogist integration of subject and object, idea and thing, substance and history because of the latter’s rejection of fideism and the former’s complete commitment to the God of faith. The intricate ways in which idealist theism and worldly rationalism were at once intertwined and yet distinct in the late 18th and early 19th century is described by Breckman in his discussion of the Romantics’ discourse with Jacobi:

³⁰⁷ Jacobi was president of the Academy of Sciences between 1807 and 1812, and his ideas have been said to have anticipated some central tenets of Kierkegaard’s faith-based philosophy as well as of later existentialist thought. In the *Pantheismusstreit*, Jacobi argued against Moses Mendelssohn and the latter’s defense of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who had been accused of being a Spinozist. Jacobi’s interpretation of Kant was a strictly theist one, and because of this, it is reasonable to claim that the only realist feature of his philosophy was its insistence on the finitude of real objects in the world.

In their emphasis upon the intuitive ground of this union [between self and cosmos, individual and universal spirit], the Romantic poets [such as the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, and Hölderlin], as well as Schelling and Schleiermacher, were not terribly distant from Jacobi, though of course they intuited a very different form of divinity. However, while the Poets recognized in Jacobi a kindred sensibility, Schelling and Schleiermacher both refused to make his leap of faith, preferring instead to traverse what they considered the hard ground of knowledge. Schelling and Schleiermacher would settle for nothing less than the identity of faith and knowledge, or, more precisely, they would rest only with a knowledge that sublates faith into the higher certainty afforded by the recognition of the universal subjectivity. It was on the basis of their assertion about the nature of subjectivity that both could claim the identity of man and God as the conclusion of philosophic “science.”³⁰⁸

Philosophical Idealism had to go up against traditional Christian idealism in its attempt to wrest authority from revealed religion and install a spiritualist but secularized philosophy in its place. Jacobi’s orthodox stance, by contrast, rested on the assumption of the unknowable, totally other personal God, and the priority of the leap of faith in the order of knowledge. This irrationalist position was a philosophy of belief, which viewed critical philosophy and the emerging critical theory of social reality with displeasure. The two can thus be seen as diametrically opposed. In other words, philosophy rooted in traditional theology was idealist in ways that absolute Idealism was *not* – precisely because it relied on the notion of the absolute primacy of an independent non-material, non-human, non-worldly reality. One might say that Kant’s agnosticism was ultimately defeated by Kant’s critique of pure reason (i.e. his critique of speculative metaphysics, natural theology, and traditional theodicy).³⁰⁹ Such a theoretical move situates Kant,

³⁰⁸ Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins*, 30.

³⁰⁹ Gordon Michalson Jr. does just that in his book *Kant and the Problem of God* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), where he argues that “Kant’s ties to nineteenth century post-Hegelian atheism are stronger than typically supposed.” To prove this claim, Michalson effectively shows that the “inner momentum” of Kant’s philosophy places it squarely within the movement later elaborated by Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx, namely the “powerful impetus toward atheist thinking.” According to Michaelson, Kant’s “philosophy points beyond theism toward a fully emancipated theory of autonomous rationality” and his “theistic commitment turn out upon inspection to be a subordination of divine transcendence to the undeniable prerogatives of autonomous rationality” (Michalson, *Kant and the Problem of God*, viii-6).

Hegel, and Marx on one trajectory of the sort that has been theorized by Althusser as a “tendency struggle.”³¹⁰

Schelling, as is known, later reaffirmed traditional Christian spiritualism. He turned unequivocally against Hegelianism when the Prussian government called him in 1844, from retirement and at a fairly advanced age, to Berlin to accept Hegel’s post and to squelch the subversive Hegelian credo (the “dragon seed of Hegelianism,”³¹¹ as King Friedrich Wilhelm IV so eloquently put it). Whereas Schleiermacher had always been a theologian first (albeit one who was accused of Spinozism) and a critical philosopher second, the later Schelling’s “positive philosophy” marked a complete reversal of his earlier Idealism. Recanting his previous position, he extended Jacobi’s argument about the “nihilistic” consequences of rationalist thinking and advanced similar notions about the need to preserve a sense of (a higher, intuited, transcendent) “reality” in theoretical inquiry. Unlike Jacobi, but like the so-called “speculative theists,” Schelling emphasized the importance of philosophy, maintaining that it should concern itself with that part of the world which, according to him, was knowable, that is, all of it, minus God. Schelling held fast to the idea that there was an unknowable “ground” which “negative,” i.e. rational, knowledge could not access.³¹² Only positive knowledge, i.e. faith, could grasp the external condition of all thought.

³¹⁰ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 34.

³¹¹ Cited in John Rees, *The Algebra of Revolution: The Dialectic and the Classical Marxist Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 61.

³¹² In the words of Schelling: “[A]ll is rule, order, and form in the world as we now see it. But the ruleless still lies in the ground as if it could break through once again. . . . This is the incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in the understanding, but rather remains eternally in the ground” (quoted in Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins*, 60).

For a contemporary interpretation of this concept, see, for instance, Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996). Interesting uses have been made by contemporary psychoanalytical social theories, including also those of Julia Kristeva and Ernesto Laclau, of Schelling’s ontological postulate of the groundless ground or “hard kernel” that eludes all rational thought and resists all signification.

The “speculative theists”³¹³ were also intent on correcting Jacobi’s mysticism. Christian Hermann Weiße (son of Christian Felix Weiße, the Leipzig poet) and Immanuel Hermann Fichte (son of the famous Kantian Johann Gottlieb Fichte, foremost thinker of subjective Idealism) wanted to reconcile speculation and the biblical God, and they also relied on the opposition between the abstract categories of rationality, thought of as negative, and the positive power of the definite and the particular. They charged that Hegel privileged the former and neglected the latter, an allegation which was not unfounded – especially not with the terms defined in this manner. Hence, restricting science to only one set of (surface) truths, and allowing for an “other” (non-scientific) knowledge of an “other” (non-phenomenal) Truth, the “speculative theists” opened the door wide for the reaffirmation of the ultimate sovereignty of an original or first reality which, even though it was clearly perceived as ideal, was argued to be more concrete than mundane reality.

This line of argument made it possible for Weiße and Fichte, as well as for Schelling, to claim that Hegel’s evacuation of the place of the person of God amounted to a terrible tyranny of the concept over life, the latter of which, according to them, was the creative being that had given birth to the concept in the first place. Thus arguing that Hegelian philosophy was an unworldly, logocentric asceticism, they vigorously advocated a new appreciation of what Schelling, among other things, called the “empirical.” This position is intriguing for its uncanny apparent resonances with the Young Hegelian critique of metaphysics and Marx’s ideology critique. After all, Feuerbach, Stirner, and Marx were using very similar terminology when they attacked the explicit and implicit idealism in Hegel’s and one another’s work. This ostensible paradox,

³¹³ Johann G. F. Billroth can also be counted among this group.

however, can be easily solved once it becomes clear that the empirical reality that Feuerbach, Stirner, and Marx had in mind was one of sensuous materiality, the immediate human will, and practical human activity, respectively, not a forever removed and constant ideal Subject.

There was one other important anti-Hegelian strand of thought contributing to the cacophony of reactionary voices that issued from the ranks of philosophy. Amplifying the outspoken diatribes of theologians like August von Tholuck and Ernst Hengstenberg, was the political philosophy of Friedrich Julius Stahl. He, too, was summoned by the government (Friedrich Wilhelm IV and J.A.F. Eichhorn) to join Schelling in the fight against the heretics, and he replaced the chair at the University of Berlin, Faculty of Law, which had been formerly occupied by Eduard Gans, the recognized Hegelian jurist. Stahl decided, along with the speculative theists, that faith and philosophy could very well be accommodated within one and the same system of knowledge. In the main, Stahl was a follower of Schelling, whose ideas he appropriated and applied to his reconceptualization of the state as a public (rather than private³¹⁴) institution with the absolute will of the monarch as its governing principle. The difference between his and Hegel's notion of the state³¹⁵ was that Stahl did not argue divine right; rather, he rejected the possibly pantheistic implications of this theory, proposing instead an analogous relationship. Interestingly, while Hegel did not see the Christian state as a problem but as a fairly advanced form of the ideal state, Stahl was in favor of a strict separation between state

³¹⁴ This is where he disagreed with Karl Ludwig von Haller, who had conceived of the state as the monarch's private domain, which was his property and over which he held full rights.

³¹⁵ The controversy over Hegel's theory of the state and the extent to which it served as an *apologia* for Prussian authoritarianism is relevant here because it demonstrates how problematic Hegel's concept of the secular as an expression of the divine was. If the state was a form of the spirit, then of course, the individual had to live in conformity with the will of the state, and calling this freedom, as Hegel did, is clearly a legitimization of a particular power arrangement.

and church. Contemplating this complexity, Breckman asks the question to what extent Stahl's concept of the state was more secular than Hegel's. He comes down on the side of Hegel, arguing that Hegel effectively secularized in theory both religion and state while Stahl only confined the secular state to a distinct realm, the profane this-worldly realm, opposing it (and ultimately subordinating it) to the superior authority of otherworldly religious precepts.³¹⁶

An appropriate conclusion to this discussion is a return to Althusser, who argued that Gramsci's easy equation of religion and science is deeply problematic. To be sure, Althusser would not agree that Hegel overcame religion, but my sympathetic reading of Hegel allows us to see his philosophy and the philosophies that his work inspired as fundamentally different from the reactionary thought discussed here. This difference consists in the fact that unlike Romantic philosophy, Hegelian philosophy "puts an end to [or attempts to put an end to] any supraterritorial 'beyond.' . . . [by theorizing] absolute immanence [or "earthliness"]."³¹⁷ It insists that a view based on a laborious reckoning with the determination of *this* world is more likely to grasp and confront what is real, actual, and necessary than a preoccupation with a hidden, ethereal essence. It is here that we must resist reducing the fundamentally different movements of Pietistic fundamentalism and Hegelian philosophy to merely two worldviews that responded to the same historical experience. The two positions were precisely not interchangeable (even if several proponents of either position switched sides some time during the controversy at least once). The Hegelian School and the conservative Reaction were not simply advocating two equally valid perspectives. To the contrary, presenting Hegelians

³¹⁶ Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins*, 88-89.

³¹⁷ Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 131.

and anti-Hegelians as similar(ly utopian) is taking a leveling approach that not only does not dare to make decisive theoretical and political judgments but also distorts historical events. Abstract references to worldviews without any attendant discussion of the stakes and specific commitments must remain impotent and will end up in a relativist quagmire. Instead, we must produce a clear understanding of what constitutes critique at a certain historical moment and how critique generates truth about both that particular historical moment and history. It is for this reason that I shall now turn to the Young Hegelians and illustrate how radical Hegelian thought brought forth the wager about the impending end of philosophy.

The Biblical Criticism of David Strauß

It appeared to the author of the work . . . that it was time to substitute a new mode of considering the life of Jesus. . . . [T]he recent attempts to recover, by the aid of a mystical philosophy, the supernatural point of view held by our forefathers, betray themselves, by the exaggerating spirit in which they are conceived, to be final, desperate efforts to render the past present, the inconceivable conceivable.

The new point of view . . . is not brought to bear on the evangelical history for the first time in the present work: it has long been applied to particular parts of that history, and is here only extended to its entire tenor. It is not by any means meant that the whole history of Jesus is to be represented as mythical, but only that every part of it is to be subjected to a critical examination, to ascertain whether it has not some admixture of the mythical. The exegesis of the ancient church set out from the double presupposition: first that the gospels contained a history, and secondly, that this history was a supernatural one. Rationalism rejected the latter of these presuppositions, but only to cling the more tenaciously to the former, maintaining that books present unadulterated, thought only natural, history. Science cannot rest satisfied with this half-measure: the other presupposition must also be relinquished, and the inquiry must first be made whether in fact, and to what extent, the ground in which we stand in the gospels is historical.³¹⁸

³¹⁸ David Friedrich Strauß, *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*, 2 volumes (New York: Calvin Banchard), 1860. This is the beginning of the preface to the first German edition. The translation is that of George Eliot (Marian Evans) who used the fourth edition, which does not include several of Strauß's discussions of Hegel. Evans had also translated Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*.

The work that is generally credited with having started a new phase of Left Hegelianism is David Friedrich Strauß's *Life of Jesus: Critically Examined* (1835-36).³¹⁹ The young theologian Strauß, motivated by the same questions that had occupied the older generation of Hegelians, namely the relation between faith and knowledge, between religion and philosophy, and between history and the present, applied Hegelian ideas to the New Testament and maintained with a resolve and certainty, which had become rare in a school of thought that found itself in an increasingly embattled situation, that the *Vorstellung* was absolutely inferior to the *Begriff*, that the two could not be reconciled and that the latter had to overcome the former: specifically the Christian notion that biblical events recounted historical truths.

³¹⁹ The literature on David Strauß is not very extensive. There are, however, a few monographs, some of them quite dated. One may mention, for example, Horton Harris's *David Friedrich Strauß and His Theology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), Gotthold Müller's *Identität und Immanenz: Zur Genese der Theologie von David Friedrich Strauß* (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), Jörg F. Sandberger's *David Friedrich Strauß als theologischer Hegelianer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1972), and Theobald Ziegler's *David Friedrich Strauß* (Straußburg: K. J. Trübner, 1908).

A good account of Strauß's *Life of Jesus* in its historical context is offered by Marilyn Chapin Massey in *Christ Unmasked: The Meaning of The Life of Jesus in German Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983). Massey's work is a successful attempt at challenging the negative image that relies on Nietzsche's damning judgment of Strauß as the epitome of the "cultural philistine." The original, albeit undertheorized, angle proposed by Chapin Massey is that the indirect connection between Strauß's critique of Christian dogma and Gutzkow's *Wally the Skeptic* provides a feminist perspective on early nineteenth-century problematizations of what she calls "the pathology of heartfelt religion" (Massey, 148): "When read together with *Wally the Skeptic*, it can be seen that *The Life of Jesus* brought into question not only religion's potential to legitimate an oppressive political order but also its potential to create an entrapping inner space" with all its sexist implications (ibid., 148-9).

Chapin Massey's assertion that *The Life of Jesus* was a direct attack on Christian and monarchical personalism can be seen to have provided the cues for Breckman's work on the subject, and her sustained effort to "explain that the basis for the relationship between the definitive roles of *The Life of Jesus* in the history of Christian thought and in sociopolitical history is the text's political meaning" (ibid., 142) is commendable for its insight into the precise nature of Strauß's radicalism. One interesting productive strand of Chapin Massey's argument is her notion of the centrality of the concept of irony in Strauß's book. Accepting the claim that "[t]he *Life of Jesus* implied a radical democratic politics similar to that espoused by Heine and by the young Marx" (ibid., 12), Massey succinctly adds that Strauß further challenged literary conventions with his style. Because Strauß declared in his defense of his own book that its tone, that of comic irony (rather than tragedy), in the face of a total loss of faith, was an expression of the critical attitude necessary for a self-conscious age, he produced a sophisticated vindication of the democratic freedom of thought, or in Vischer's words, of "the rights of irony as the principle of spiritual freedom" (quoted in ibid., 71).

Whereas conservative and accommodationist Hegelians had always deduced the “necessity” of scriptural veracity from the *a priori* standpoint of the philosophical concept, Strauß proposed to apply science to the study of the biblical account and argued that if an event (e.g. miracles) contradicted natural law it could not have taken place. He asserted that theologians had to test the reliability of the stories empirically by a process of induction and to reject those that offended the rational mind. According to Strauß, only after such a ruthless examination of the credibility of the gospels and an unswerving courage to reject any and all affronts to reason in the biblical record could the eternal truth of Christianity be upheld. Because Strauß had no doubts that such final authentication would be possible, he is sometimes argued to have straddled the divide between the Old Left and the first wave of Young Hegelianism. Imitating the language of his critics, Strauß described the implications of his work as follows: “The results of the inquiry . . . have apparently annihilated the greatest and most valuable part of that which the Christian has been wont to believe concerning his Saviour Jesus, have uprooted all the animating motives which he has gathered from his faith, and withered all his consolations.” It is important to note the word “apparently” in this passage, as Strauß continues to show that the “re-establishment of faith” is in fact possible through a surpassing of “historical criticism” by “dogmatical criticism”; Strauß speaks of a process of “criticism, as a force of negativity and of the struggle for mediation.”³²⁰ Indeed, Strauß never agreed to being called an atheist, was certainly not a socialist, made a point to separate himself from both the *Jungdeutschen* and the second wave of Young Hegelians, and never lost his attachment to academic status and class privilege.

³²⁰ Strauß, *The Life of Jesus*, 140 .

Strauß may have thought that he merely proved what the master, whom he had met only days before he died, had established, namely the identity in content of religion and philosophy, but his denunciation of supernatural history did not meet with much applause, not even from his fellow Hegelians. In the course of events, Strauß's use of the concept of myth in his critique of revelation, though not unprecedented, and his attempt to salvage only the Idea of Christianity, as well as his refusal to accept the idea of a leap of faith (which Kierkegaard remained insistent upon) became the center of a tumultuous controversy that reached far beyond the realm of theology and caused Strauß's isolation from the academic community and from the Hegelian School.³²¹ He ended up recanting his ideas two years after the publication of his book, but shortly thereafter he reclaimed its radical message and renounced his own capitulation.

Because of his critical theology, Strauß joined those who had been ostracized before him for similar reasons. In the *Wolfenbüttel Fragments* (1774-78), for example, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had published the writings of Hermann Samuel Reimarus, who had put together a study of the inconsistencies contained in the gospel stories.³²² Reimarus had challenged the truth of the Bible, and, even though Lessing reaffirmed the Christian "spirit" at the end of the book,³²³ Lessing's theological writings were banned, and Lessing died hated and reviled. The connection between the foremost figure of the

³²¹ Altenstein specifically asked Göschel, the figure head of the conservative Hegelians, to write a review of Strauß's book in order to make it clear that orthodox Hegelianism did not approve of the work and what it stood for.

³²² See H. S. Reimarus, *Fragmente des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten* (*Fragments by an Anonymous Writer*), 5th ed. (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1895); and *Reimarus: Fragments*, Lives of Jesus Series, ed. by Charles H. Talbert, translated by Ralph S. Fraser (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

³²³ Thus, he says, "Kurz: der Buchstabe ist nicht der Geist; und die Bibel ist nicht die Religion. Folglich since Einwürfe gegen den Buchstaben, und gegen die Bibel, nicht eben auch Einwürfe gegen den Geist und gegen die Religion" (Reimarus, *Fragmente*, 299).

German Enlightenment and Strauß's recovery of rational biblical criticism has prompted Marilyn Chapin Massey to assert that he "resurrected the specter of Lessing."³²⁴

The force with which Strauß's ideas were denounced as heresy are surprising in retrospect because they were not particularly original. After all, Hegel himself, who may have purposely avoided the problem of the historicity of the Gospels, had described religion as a "symbolic" representation of the truth of Christianity. Similarly, the French rationalists had conceived of religion as an elaborate system of lies designed to deceive people and sanction worldly authority. Voltaire, Paine, and Hume had all expressed religious skepticism before Strauß and before Hegel. In fact, by the time Strauß wrote his *Life of Jesus*, the Bible had increasingly become treated like any other historical document, and its content had been subjected to critical scrutiny. The Halle rationalists Julius August Ludwig Wegscheider and Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm Gesenius, a very established Orientalist and critical theologian, had questioned the accuracy of the biblical narratives and had to endure to vicious attacks by Hengstenberg in 1830. Moreover, historians Barthold Georg Niebuhr and Leopold von Ranke were offering critical analyses of other historical texts. Also, the study of mythology in Germany had its origins with Johann Gottfried Herder and the brothers Jakob Ludwig Karl and Wilhelm Karl Grimm, for example. The connection between religion and myth was recognized by many, including Strauß's teacher F. C. Baur.³²⁵

The meaning of Strauß's actions, then, must be sought in their symbolic ramifications, and Strauß's radicalism must be understood less in terms of the content of *The Life of Jesus* but in terms of the fact that he was making a statement: a statement, that

³²⁴ Massey, *Christ Unmasked*, 48.

³²⁵ F. C. Baur, *Symbolism and Mythology: The natural religion of Antiquity* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1824-25).

is, about the responsibility of historical science toward empirical reality, which was necessarily a statement about the irrelevance of political interests and authorities for questions of truth. The immense stir provoked by this work is aptly described by Chapin Massey in her explanation that “[t]hroughout Germany, in state bureaucracies, coffeehouses, and beer halls, as well as in church pulpits and basements, *The Life of Jesus* would be discussed not as a technical academic treatise but as a political symbol – or rather as divergent political symbols of sedition against the state, on the one hand, and political free choice on the other.”³²⁶ Again, we can observe here that much of Young Hegelian radicalism becomes intelligible only in the context of the repressive political and religious apparatus against which it defined itself.

With regard to the *content* of Strauß’s work, it is difficult not to perceive a deep contradiction. While on the one hand, he persistently juxtaposed “the domain of science . . . [with] bigotry and fanaticism,” he was notably less inclined to declare faith as invalid; in fact, he speaks repeatedly of the security of his “conviction that no injury is threatened to the Christian faith,” for instance in the preface to the second edition, where he states, “The author is aware that the essence of the Christian faith is perfectly independent of his criticism. The supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension, remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts.” On the other hand, his critical ideas prevailed over his accommodationist ones. After having already retracted some of the more controversial claims of *Life of Jesus* in the second edition of 1837, Strauß made some serious concessions in the third edition of 1838 and revised his original skepticism in significant aspects. However, after a brief period of personal and intellectual desolation, he

³²⁶ Massey, *Christ Unmasked*, 36.

recovered both his critical spirit and his confidence in his original work, chiding himself for having compromised his position in the face of his antagonists. In the fourth edition of the work, published in 1839-40, Strauß returned to his original stance and openly regrets his wavering.

It is obvious why the sweeping scope of the historical criticism Strauß advocated and his insistence on the scientificity of his critique, which combined to shift the Hegelian fusion of the experiential moment of belief and speculative knowledge unmistakably toward the latter, attracted opposition from anti-rationalists of all stripes. His unmasking of Christ as a historical person imbued by the collective unconscious with mythical constructs amounted to a denial not only of the reality of God's incarnation in Jesus³²⁷ but also of the personalist interpretation of the Hegelian doctrine of the objectification of the Absolute in the concrete. In retrospect, we can say that Strauß's dissident theology did much to prepare the way for Feuerbach's concept of the divine nature of human beings, even though, of course, no linear development may be supposed. In 1835, however, nobody came to Strauß's defense, and even his friends tried to disassociate themselves from him.³²⁸ Only when he was offered an academic chair at the University of Zürich and was immediately retired due to popular pressure,³²⁹ he regained his confidence, and his two-volume work *The Christian Faith*³³⁰ (1840-1) was an even

³²⁷ Strauß attributed the myth of Jesus both to the person of Jesus himself, especially the impression he left on his contemporaries, as well as the messianic hopes of the Jews.

³²⁸ Strauß's colleague at Tübingen, Karl Adolph von Eschenmayer, wrote a reproachful review of *Life of Jesus*, titled *The Iscariotism of our Time* (1835). Moreover, his teacher Baur and his associates, including Wilhelm Vatke, deserted him. (Interestingly, Vatke had written a critique not too unlike that of Strauß (*The Religion of the Old Testament, Developed After the Canonical Texts*, 1835); the reason, however, why it did not attain the level of notoriety of Strauß's book was because Vatke applied the method of empirical criticism to the Old Testament only and refused to do the same for the New Testament.) Only his friend Vischer stood by Strauß.

³²⁹ Following the upheaval over his appointment, the Reaction overthrew the liberal government in Zürich in 1839.

³³⁰ The title of the book, sometimes translated as *On Christian Doctrine*, is *Die christliche Glaubenslehre, in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung und im Kampf mit der modernen Wissenschaft dargestellt*.

more radicalized version of his proposal in *Life of Jesus*, convinced as he now was that Christian faith and philosophical knowledge were not only different in form but also in content.³³¹ As Toews puts it, “[t]he bridge over the vast chasm between faith and knowledge had been flimsy from the beginning and had now collapsed completely.”³³²

What made Strauß a Young Hegelian³³³ was his refusal to accept the absolute alterity of God and his attempt to ground the divine spirit in the human species – or, as Massey puts it, to “see humanity as the miracle worker and agent of the life-enhancing world spirit.”³³⁴ Insisting that religion represented a primitive form of consciousness that was out of step with modern times and needed to be relegated to the past, Strauß developed further the notion that “mind” was the truth behind the divine Other. Like Feuerbach a few years later, Strauß advanced a theory of alienation in his argument, according to which, in deifying and worshipping Jesus, Christians did not completely break with the Judaic notion of the otherness of God and that biblical literalism was based on a basic misrecognition, a projection.

In the first few lines of *The Life of Jesus*, Strauß declares: “Wherever a religion, resting upon written records, prolongs and extends the sphere of its domination, accompanying its votaries through the varied and progressive stages of mental cultivation, a discrepancy . . . will inevitably sooner or later arise.” This discrepancy is that “between the modern culture and the ancient records,” the latter of which are

³³¹ In his 1840-41 book *The Christian Doctrine in its Historical Development and in its conflict with Modern Knowledge*, he outright rejected Hegel’s idea of the identity of content in philosophy and religion and by so doing explicitly allied himself with the Hegelian Left.

³³² Toews, *Hegelianism*, 283.

³³³ At the very least, it can be asserted that Strauß’s “theological radicalism also helped to inspire Left-Hegelianism” (Richard Cromwell, *David Friedrich Strauß and His Place in Modern Thought* [Fair Lawn, NJ: R. E. Burdick, 1974], 16.)

³³⁴ Massey, *Christ Unmasked*, 87.

revealed by the former as containing fantastic distortions of actual historical events.³³⁵ In response to the question of how to treat the present-day remnants of an antiquated way of thinking, Strauß struggled to suspend the differences between everyday religiosity and philosophical knowledge. The clash between the two languages was resolved by him such that at first he seemed convinced that popular consciousness was not advanced enough to absorb the higher truth of the concept. Later, he appeared to believe that it was precisely the task of the theologian-scientist to raise his community's consciousness. His *The Life of Jesus Adapted for the German People* (1864) was a version of his theory directly specifically at the public, rather than at theologians.

While Strauß's philosophy was certainly a "revolution of modern theology,"³³⁶ it is impossible not to add that Strauß's humanism, like that of Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and many other Young Hegelians, especially the theologians amongst them, was spiritualist. Strauß was a pantheist, rather than an atheist – even as the secularism in his philosophy can be seen to have worked ceaselessly to undercut his theism. Because of this, Strauß's writings illustrate that critical philosophy in the early nineteenth century was mired in the religious conviction that beyond finite existence and mundane life there is a higher meaning, a purpose, and final secret that would eventually present itself. Massey supports this idea when she asserts that it was precisely Strauß's positive assertion of the activity of the collective consciousness that constituted his "act of recovering the substantial."³³⁷ What she implies is that even though Strauß replaced what he considered a subjectivist account of the biblical events with an objective account of the mythological beliefs of a

³³⁵ Strauß, *The Life of Jesus*, 11.

³³⁶ Cromwell, *David Friedrich Strauß*, 51.

³³⁷ Massey, *Christ Unmasked*, 77.

certain people at a certain time, this shift was accompanied by a yearning to invest the objective dimension with metaphysical qualities.

In other words, piety may have turned into a terrestrial morality, and belief may have been discredited in favor of reason, but his was an ideology, a philosophy of the Idea. Despite Strauß's concerns about the clash between thought and reality, he left social life unexamined, grasping reality only in abstract terms, as a moment characterized by lack and inadequacy. Moreover, historical change was conceived as a process of education, and, as Toews says, "Strauß remained within the 'spiritual' confines of the Hegelian cultural model and never developed a clear theory of social and political practice or collective historical change."³³⁸ Such judgments of the deficiencies of Strauß's perspective are, of course, to some extent retrospective ones, informed as they are by the Marxian critique, but it is precisely this approach that will allow us to understand Strauß's critical theory in its radical implications *and* in its limitations.

By 1841, Strauß had severed his connections with the *Hallische Jahrbücher* and the Young Hegelians. He was decidedly anti-democracy and protested against being called a radical and being discussed together with Young Germany. Brazill is particularly critical; claiming that Strauß "had the posture of a cultural aristocrat: [that] he hated mob agitation and popular movements, [and] feared that democracy meant the end of culture"³³⁹ Brazill also points out that, while Strauß initially approved of the 1848 Revolution in France, "[o]nce the revolution broke out in Germany, however, Strauß lost that fleeting enthusiasm and began to assume the habit of an Olympian Goethe who, in artistic loftiness, could gaze down in reserved disdain on mass movements."³⁴⁰ Moreover,

³³⁸ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 287.

³³⁹ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 121.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

Strauß became very pro-Prussian, especially with Bismarck's war against Austria in 1866 and then the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. He can be said to have held a certain kind of nationalist position, as he tended to be anti-cosmopolitan, anti-France, and pro-unification. Towards the end of Strauß's life, Brazill maintains, Strauß's humanism "amounted to accepting the leadership of a few gifted individuals, accepting conservative values in politics, bourgeois morality, the need for an occasional war, the nation as 'divinely ordained'" Pro-private property, Strauß "exalted the middle class, its values and achievements."³⁴¹ Brazill further argues that "[h]umanism for him was always philosophical, never political and social. He was always the cultural aristocrat. He saw a humanism that would be invariably confined to the study and the drawing room, the art gallery and the lecture hall."³⁴²

In other words, Strauß was never a communist. However, his thinking was radical nevertheless. He managed to appropriate Hegel's philosophy in a decidedly materialist direction. In *The Old and the New Faith* (1872), Strauß's last major book, he declared that "what I have said amounts to crass materialism, I shall not deny it."³⁴³ In fact, his intervention in the theological discussion about the historical Jesus Christ contributed centrally to the Left Hegelian conception of history as a this-worldly process, one which was centered not on the inexorability of the divine will of a personal God but on human activity and consciousness. His own (albeit unsuccessful) candidacy for the National

³⁴¹ Ibid., 130.

³⁴² Ibid., 132. The young Nietzsche later criticized Strauß for all those things in his review of Strauß's biographical work *Der alte und der neue Glaube* in his 1873 pamphlet "David Strauß: the Confessor and the Writer." This "meditation" is contained in Daniel Breazeale (ed.), *Untimely Meditations*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). In this essay, Nietzsche accuses Strauß of being a "cultural philistine" (7) who urges everyone to philosophize with "the sole proviso . . . that everything must remain as it was before, that nothing should at any price undermine the 'rational' and the 'real'" (11). Specifically, Nietzsche argues that Strauß's "new faith" is a source of disappointment for those who once thought him to be a thinker.

³⁴³ David Friedrich Strauß, *The Old Faith and the New: A Confession*, trans. from the sixth edition by Mathilde Blind (New York: Henry Holt, 1973).

Assembly and his service in the Wuerttemberg Landtag (even though a disappointment for his friends and electorate) demonstrate that he himself took his earthly tasks very seriously. Strauß's historical realism was, as Chapin Massey says, "the only form possible for expressing urgent social and political criticism in the Germany of that day."³⁴⁴ Moreover, Strauß's insistence on the importance of negation *qua* rational critique, as well as his rejection of immediate resolution, helped to open the door wide for the more obviously atheist and philosophies of the Young Hegelians.

³⁴⁴ Chapin Massey, 78.

CHAPTER 3

From Revelation to Revolution: The Work and Politics of Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Feuerbach

If it requires some imagination to think of Bruno Bauer as intellectually related to Marx, Ruge, or Hess, or even Feuerbach and Stirner, it is because much of his thought on revolution and political intervention was distinctly undemocratic, intellectualist, and conservative. However, Bauer shared many core assumptions with his fellow Left Hegelians. Bauer contributed greatly to the secularization of philosophy, and his interpretation of Hegel was clearly on the side of immanence. It is the fiercely this-worldly and atheist Bauer, the Bauer who constantly probed and theorized the harshly antithetical moments of the dialectic, the Bauer who poured scorn and stern judgment over any attempt at compromise with the old order, the Bauer who asked about the meaning of radicalism – it is *this* Bauer who will be the subject of the following discussion.

Feuerbach is known to have had a seminal influence on the early Marx. However, what is rarely recognized is that Marx's relation to Feuerbach was ultimately not a purely negative one. That is, Marx's great achievement was not only to rid himself of Feuerbachian anthropological humanism in favor of a more historical, more concretely social materialist approach, but also to *retain* the radical impetus behind Feuerbach's critique of philosophy. When looked at from the perspective of Feuerbach, one finds that,

at his politically most expressive, Feuerbach was much more attentive to social reality and the concretely historical than it often assumed. However, it is particularly Feuerbach's notion of a philosophy as thoroughly permeated by idealist misconceptions that interests us here because it *preceded* Marx's critique of "the German ideology."

The Terrorism of Critique

Bruno Bauer (1809-1882) is generally recognized as the most prominent representative among the Young Hegelians after Feuerbach, Marx, and Engels.³⁴⁵ This image is accurate insofar as it conveys Bauer's prominent role among the German radicals before 1848 and the importance of his intellectual influence. And yet, his place in relation to the group of thinkers with whom the young Marx developed his approach to Hegel has remained ambiguous. Partially because of Marx's own public break with Bauer and partially because of Bauer's consistent opposition to socialism, the impression has emerged that

³⁴⁵ Three of the most notable Bauer experts are Ernst Barnikol (*Bruno Bauer: Studien und Materialien*, ed. by Peter Reimer and Hans-Martin Sass [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972]), Zvi Rosen (*Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx: The Influence of Bruno Bauer on Marx's Thought*, [The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977]), and Douglas Moggach (*The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003]). Barnikol produced the first, albeit unfinished, monograph of Bruno Bauer and laid the groundwork for twentieth-century Bauer scholarship. It is due to his research that we know as much as we do about Bauer's life. Barnikol also discovered a text that was believed to have been lost, titled *Das Entdeckte Christentum* and published it in 1927.

Zvi Rosen's work has contributed to the scholarship on the Young Hegelians not only in general by offering the first and so far last in-depth study of Bauer's ideas in English but specifically by "producing evidence of the fact that Bauer's role in crystallizing Marx's views has been unfairly underestimated" (8). The book is interesting primarily for its comparative and contextual account of the relation between Bauer's and Marx's ideas about Hegel, religion, and alienation. Much more recently, Moggach's work has focused on Bauer's particular philosophical approach in contradistinction to his contemporaries. Moggach argues that Bauer was essentially a republican thinker who distanced himself explicitly from liberalism and socialism.

Other works relevant to a study of Bauer are Wolfgang Ebbach's, *Die Junghegelianer: Soziologie einer Intellektuellengruppe* (München: W. Fink, 1988), Antonio Gargano's *Bruno Bauer* (Napoli: La città del sole, 2003), Dieter Hertz-Eichenrode's *Der Junghegelianer Bruno Bauer im Vormärz: Inauguraldissertation* (FU Berlin, 1959), Massimiliano Tomba's, *Crisi e critica in Bruno Bauer: Il principio di esclusione come fondamento del politico* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2002), and Ruedi Waser's *Autonomie des Selbstbewußtseins: Eine Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Bruno Bauer und Karl Marx—1835-1843*, Basler Studien zur Philosophie 4 (Tübingen: Francke, 1994).

Bauer's historical relevance lies primarily in forcing Marx to articulate his own position by freeing himself of the encrustations of philosophical idealism. What this picture misses is that, despite their eventual theoretical and political differences, and despite the bitter enmity that characterized their relationship from 1842 onwards, Marx and Bauer were, for a significant period of time, embroiled in an intense struggle over what constitutes revolutionary praxis. It is often forgotten that their common interest was to develop a truly radical science of historical transformation. Their conclusions may have been at odds, but the fact remains that Bauer played a crucial role in the formation of an atheist, humanist, and practical critical theory.

It seems that one of the main reasons why Bauer's contribution to Young Hegelian radicalism is in question today is because his total intellectual development was, like Heinrich Leo's, marked by several major shifts, if not ruptures. But while Leo became progressively conservative and finally a Christian fundamentalist, Bauer's early years as a staunch Right Hegelian ended when his philosophical vision took off in a decisively leftist direction. After his critical turn, Bauer became one of the leading figures for one of the main contingents of radical thinkers in Germany, the Prussian Young Hegelians. But Bauer did not remain faithful to his revolutionary Hegelianism, for with the collapse of the 1848 revolutionary movements, Bauer adopted a cynical and anti-political attitude toward the possibility of immanent historical change, reverting to an accommodationist stance, which was effectively not too unlike the one he had left behind as a young intellectual.

During the last decades of his life, Bauer became very conservative, in apparently marked contrast with his radical period. This is evinced, for example, in the fact that he

worked with Hermann Wagener, the editor of the reactionary and anti-Semitic paper, the *Kreuzzeitung*.³⁴⁶ However, while it has traditionally been argued that there was a fundamental disjuncture at the heart of Bauer's work, this notion has more recently been challenged. One argument is that Bauer's early "metamorphosis" has been overemphasized in the literature and that Bauer remained a Hegelian throughout his entire career; further, even after his defection to the Young Hegelians, he never came to share the communist ideas of Marx and Engels, the socialist agenda of thinkers like Hess, the anarchist tendencies of Stirner and Edgar Bauer, or even just the progressivism of Ruge. Sidney Hook³⁴⁷, for example, has described the conservative "turn" as less of a genuine change in outlook than an outcome of his general intellectual tendencies:

There was a sound empirical kernel obscured in this transcendental mythology. It needed a social, materialistic base. But Bauer was unable to develop it. As a consequence, his refusal to recognize the essential unity between theory and practice made his sweeping negations not only harmless to existing social iniquities but even positively dangerous to the attempts to begin actual reform. From his standpoint of theoretical intransigence, he hurled charges of inconsistency against all those who accepted the existing order to be better able to change it. The more violent his declamatory tirade against authority, the more impatient he was with those who had begun to forge from the weapons of criticism, real weapons of social combat. Unwittingly he became a practical social force, giving direct aid to the reactionary tendencies of his day even when mouthing the most revolutionary phrases.³⁴⁸

Hook argues in a straightforward Marxian vein that "Bauer's social philosophy was modest, unambitious—and dangerous"³⁴⁹ because of its idealism.

³⁴⁶ See Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx*, 8. See also *ibid.*, 41. Curiously, Rosen does not see any contradiction between his own argument in favor of continuity and his assertion that "Bauer held radical and critical views for a relatively short time" (*ibid.*, 7) and that his switch from being a Right Hegelian to being perhaps *the* most outspoken Left Hegelian critic (according to Rosen) took place in the period of only three years (*ibid.*, 46).

³⁴⁷ Ironically, Hook's thought eventually underwent a similar transformation.

³⁴⁸ Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*, 97.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

The idea of a deep change in political commitment was challenged not only from a leftist perspective but also from a liberal perspective.³⁵⁰ In fact, there are a number of scholars who have demonstrated that Bauer's initial conversion from orthodox to critical Hegelian was not so much a conversion as a logical consequence of his particular approach to philosophy. Zvi Rosen, for example, has maintained that "[i]n the light of the dynamics of development of Bauer's philosophy," his evolution towards radicalism and atheism was only natural.³⁵¹ In this, he disagrees strongly with scholars such as Brazill, who consider Bauer's shift to have been "sudden and without warning."³⁵² Very similarly, Moggach has made a case for viewing the two turning points in Bauer's thought as not much more than distinct moments in the development of an overall coherent system of ideas. Demonstrating that the supposed fissures in his *oeuvre* were actually fluid transitions and that Bauer's earliest as well as his latest works contained at their very core, though in somewhat muffled form, the very same radicalism that had become so pronounced in the late 30's and throughout the 40s, Moggach maintains that despite the real changes and the real ambiguities, Bauer was a revolutionary for most of his life.

This chapter will assume this latter position because it will provide some critical insights into Bauer's significance for the formation of radical critical theory. Moggach has argued forcefully that "[t]he recognition of Bauer's late, *sui generis* conservatism

³⁵⁰ A rather unusual version of the claim that Bauer's critical period was *not* an aberration in a generally conservative mode of thought has been advanced by Hans-Martin Sass, who has tried to demonstrate that "[t]here is no breach between the young radical Critic Bauer and the conservative Bauer; one position developed from the other" ("Bruno Bauer's Critical Theory," *Philosophical Forum: A Quarterly* 8 [1978]: 107), suggesting, however, that the "real" Bauer was a political radical and enemy of the state whose final move into the folds of conservatism, for which Sass retroactively congratulates Bauer, could not save him from the verdict of having belonged to the camp of "counter-legal political criminals." Sass speaks of "modern vandalism" and urban guerillas and accuses Bauer and his ilk (presumably anti-democratic fanatics on the left and the right) as having provided a "justification of terror by intellectual phrases in illegitimate gangs." Sass comes to questionable conclusion that Bauerian critical theory channeled directly into the "Stalinist and Fascistic experiences" (ibid., 110-1).

³⁵¹ Ibid., 3.

³⁵² Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 179.

should not obscure the diametrically opposed position he held, and defended ably and publicly, prior to and during the revolutionary events.”³⁵³ To emphasize the radical aspects of Bauer’s thinking is not to dismiss the reactionary aspects. Overall, this dissertation advocates charting a middle course that recognizes the presence of both extremes in Bauer’s thought. However, while this chapter is interested primarily in the leftist Bauer, Chapter 4 will consider the distinctions between Marx’s leftism and Bauer’s leftism from the perspective of Marx. Both of these tasks are accomplished by way of a focus on the Bauer of the interim period. In order to highlight the connections between Marx and Bauer here, I will propose some ways in which his very distinctive Left Hegelianism can be understood as quasi-materialist. In the process, I shall put forward the counter-intuitive thesis that the generally accepted perspective on Bauer as a thorough-going idealist must not be taken simply at face value but rather needs to be revised with some serious attention to the explicitly anti-metaphysical aspects of his philosophy. At the same time, it will become evident that Bauer illustrates the limits of the present inquiry insofar as his theory is paradigmatic for the failures of Young Hegelian critical philosophy, which were to become the subject of *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology*.

If we take as our point of departure the assertion that, as McLellan puts it, “his philosophy *was* one of revolution,”³⁵⁴ we can avoid portraying Bauer as a Hegelian metaphysician and question the impression — created mostly by Marx’s forceful

³⁵³ Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics*, 17.

³⁵⁴ McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 61. However, McLellan sensibly qualifies his statement by adding: “But since history was the process of self-consciousness and self-consciousness was formed by criticism, this led him to overvalue the importance of his own intellectual position and suppose that results would follow simply from the impact produced by his pamphlets. This view was that of the young Hegel” (ibid.), who famously declared that when the kingdom of ideas was revolutionized, reality could not hold out.

denunciation of the theory of self-consciousness — that Bauer’s idealism was *entirely* conservative or reactionary. In the standard account of Bauer’s position, his intellectual politics tends to be illustrated by way of those passages in his writings that portray reality not as given but as the objectification of self-consciousness. While it is true that Bauer always tried to grasp “mere particularity” as the merely outward appearance of a much more real but abstract universality, it is unfair to Bauer not to mention his insistent affirmations of the concrete quality of the here and now in opposition to Hegel’s sublimation of substance into subject. This error by omission can occur unwittingly, as may be the case with Warren Breckman who, in place of a comprehensive discussion of Bauer’s different ideas, quotes Bauer only once from the *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker* (1841) where he states that self-consciousness is . . . the only power of the world and history.”³⁵⁵ Further, if we refuse to view the Young Hegelian Bauer in light of the post-1843 Bauer³⁵⁶, we might be led to agree with McLellan’s claim that Bauer was in fact “no mere dreamer, no believer in the omnipotence of ideas [, that h]e was concerned with ‘man,’ his essence and his happiness. . . . [and that] Bauer’s references to nature, too, show that he did not neglect material reality.”³⁵⁷ Of course, all this must be advanced cautiously; however, at the very least, one can assert that, in its radical interpretation of Hegel, Bauer’s work was more compatible with certain

³⁵⁵ Quoted in Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins*, 248.

³⁵⁶ Many have claimed that Bauer ceased to be a political radical by 1848. However, Bauer’s most radical period ended quite a few years before 1848, as early as 1843. One might argue that the Bauer in *The Holy Family* was the post-1843 Bauer and that, in his critique, “Marx . . . deliberately disregards Bauer’s views as expressed between 1840-43 and limits himself to presenting those views expounded in the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*” (Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx*, 4).

³⁵⁷ McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 62. A little further down, he adds, “Bauer certainly recognised that history was not equivalent to the history of ideas” (63).

materialist philosophies, such as that of Spinoza (even though he criticized him), than has generally been acknowledged.³⁵⁸

There is, despite the disagreement over the extent to which Bauer changed his intellectual outlook, a general sense that while his first recognizably critical text was his “Herr Dr. Hengstenberg”³⁵⁹ (1839), his critique of religion essentially took shape in the short time between his still somewhat hesitant historical analysis of the Gospel of John and his much more far-reaching historicization of the Synoptic Gospels. This moment in Bauer’s life (1840-1841) marked his complete transition to Left Hegelianism. Whereas before, he had been a noted supporter of orthodoxy among the Hegelians, he became one of the most outspoken critics of revealed religion and advocates for a resolutely immanent rereading of Hegel. Even if, as some authors maintain, the period of Bauer’s transition occurred over the space of a few years, between 1838 and 1841 that is, we can still pinpoint 1839 as a crucial moment: the point at which, in Moggach’s words, “Bauer’s critical theory attains its mature form. . . .”³⁶⁰ The biographical fact that made 1839 a crucial year was Bauer’s appointment to the University of Bonn and the events surrounding his subsequent dismissal.³⁶¹ Not only did Bauer go through a deep personal crisis with respect to his faith immediately prior to, and after, his move to Bonn, moreover, his removal from the faculty resulted in an increased radicalization of his position, a process, however, that originated *before* his conflicts with the theology

³⁵⁸ In *Das entdeckte Christentum* (1843), Bauer declares that his concept of self-consciousness is in agreement with materialist philosophy, specifically with Spinoza’s “substance.”

³⁵⁹ This work was a set of letters written to his brother for the purpose of guiding Edgar’s study of theology. Essentially, these letters were a critique of Pietist Christianity, titled *Herr Dr. Hengstenberg: Ein Beitrag zur Kritik des religiösen Bewußtseins. Kritische Briefe über den Gegensatz des Gesetzes und des Evangelicums*. Bauer himself apparently later referred to the text as the moment when he abandoned apologetics (cited in Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx*, 42).

³⁶⁰ Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer*, 40.

³⁶¹ Many argue that Bauer’s political turn did occur until after he was forced to leave Bonn. See, for example, Harold Mah, *The End of Philosophy, the Origin of ‘Ideology’: Karl Marx and the Crisis of the Young Hegelians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 71.

department in Bonn. While the details of this episode do not need to be rehearsed here, it is useful to view Bauer's first attempt at a systematic critique of biblical dogma in the framework of his differences with the academic establishment. More specifically, what is significant about the incident is that Bauer's fate, like Strauß's failed attempts (in Zürich, most notably) at regaining academic employment, was both a result of, and a motor force behind, his revolutionary theory.³⁶²

Perhaps in an attempt to strengthen Bauer's wavering orthodox persuasion, Altenstein and Marheineke helped Bauer obtain a teaching position in Bonn, but the ensuing development brought only adverse effects. Having been made the object of instant animosity and ill-will on the part of his new colleagues, who had a reputation for being the "Schleiermacher faculty" in Prussia, Bauer dedicated himself to an extensive study of the Gospel of John. At first believing himself to be renewing some of his early positions, Bauer ended up provoking only the hardening of his opponents' hostility. In the course of his work, however, his initial intention to investigate the signs of divine inspiration in this book, which was generally assumed to have been the first Gospel, was disappointed and his finding, published in *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte des Johannes*, was that the Gospel of John could not be considered a factual account. Bauer concluded that the story had been fabricated by a theologian who, having lived long after Jesus' days and the time when the other Gospels were written³⁶³, was engaged in Christianity's consolidation effort. Bauer drew a distinction between this Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels, which he maintained were authentic documents demonstrating the verity of the biblical story. Moving on to a study of the Synoptic Gospels in his two-

³⁶² See also my discussion of Strauß in Chapter 2.

³⁶³ Bauer explains that the temporal discrepancy is apparent from the fact that John is projecting many issues that he was confronted with in his day back to the time when the incarnation of God took place.

volume *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker*³⁶⁴, however, Bauer discovered, one year later, that they too were in fact the products of the creative minds of individuals who had either copied from each other (as in the case of Luke and Matthew) or simply invented a great story (as in the case of Mark). This work, obviously offensive to the staunchly anti-Hegelian establishment, was submitted to the new Minister of Culture and Education, who had taken over Altenstein's post and caused Bauer to lose his teaching license permanently.³⁶⁵

There has been some discussion over why Bauer would have wanted to provoke the Minister's censure by sending him his *Critique of the Synoptics*. Some authors, such as Brazill, have intimated that Bauer deserved to be dismissed after having foolishly tested an otherwise patient establishment. Others, such as Stepelevich, have betrayed their confusion by asserting that Bauer and Strauß were equally "innocent" in confronting the authorities but that the suspension of Bauer's teaching license was "understandable."³⁶⁶ Rosen, too, claims that Bauer's "tendency to extremism" should be seen to account for what happened.³⁶⁷ However, at least one commentator has pointed out that, rather than attribute Bauer's action to a lack of common sense, we must note that "it was only in keeping with convention that. . . Bauer humbly sent the first volume of his radical work *Kritik der Geschichte der Synoptiker* to Altenstein's successor, Eichhorn."³⁶⁸

³⁶⁴ A third, and last, volume followed in 1842. Its title is *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker und des Johannes*.

³⁶⁵ The events began with Eichhorn sending Bauer's work to theologians at all nine faculties in Prussia for review. Having asked their opinion as to what kind of position Bauer was defending and whether he should be allowed to continue to teach, Eichhorn received an ambiguous response, but, especially with Marheineke expressing his disapproval also, Eichhorn suspended Bauer's *venia legendi*) anyway in 1842, prohibiting him from teaching anywhere in Prussia.

³⁶⁶ Stepelevich, *The Young Hegelians*, 11.

³⁶⁷ Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx*, 60.

³⁶⁸ Sass, "Bruno Bauer's Critical Theory," 96.

Finally, it is possible, and indeed useful, to interpret Bauer's actions as deliberate; that is to say that Bauer may well have been consciously looking to incite controversy.

The anticipation of the certain end of his academic employment likely drove Bauer to the even more explicitly political radicalism which characterized his subsequent work. Disappointed with the lack of support from colleagues and superiors, Bauer made his cause a public cause, denouncing the tyrannical politics of the new regime while discussing his dismissal in *Die gute Sache der Freiheit und meine eigene Angelegenheit* (1842). The cooperation of intellectuals and state, which had once seemed imperative for the progressive realization of the Absolute Spirit in the world, became less of a viable option and finally a categorical impossibility for Bauer. After his departure from Bonn, Bauer returned to Berlin, where he initiated the renaissance of the group known as *Die Freien*. His friends, including his brother Edgar, rallied behind him in a campaign for freedom of speech and against government repression. Even though their hope that the incident would spark a general revolt did not materialize, the group gained coherence and force in the process.

Bauer's involvement with the Berlin Young Hegelians, who had established a certain public presence and were taking an increasingly radical stance against the Prussian State, made him a much more obviously political figure than Strauß and other southern Hegelians such as Feuerbach. Nonetheless, his intellectual development mirrored theirs in several ways. Like them (and indeed almost all the Young Hegelians with an academic background), Bauer had started out as a theologian, and like them, he remained committed to the problem of religion throughout his life. However, also like Strauß and Feuerbach, he developed an enthusiastic interest in philosophy, specifically

Hegelian philosophy, and became a harsh critic of theology and religion, pointing beyond Hegel in a manner that would be the starting point for the youngest generation of Hegelians, like Marx, whose mentor and close associate and mentor Bauer was while in Bonn. (Marx's friendship with Bauer lasted about six years, and some time between 1838 and 1842, the two had become quite close. While in Bonn, they spent a lot of time together.) Like Strauß, he was concerned with the historicity of the biblical account and with demonstrating the narrative character and function of the gospels. And like Feuerbach, he had been a student under Hegel,³⁶⁹ though initially Bauer identified strongly with the epigonal task laid out by Rosenkranz, which was something Feuerbach had not done.

His early Right Hegelian views were so conservative that Bauer was not only applauded by the conformist Hegel himself just before his death,³⁷⁰ but he even received the praises of anti-Hegelian reactionaries like Hengstenberg, the fundamentalist Lutheran theologian teaching in Berlin. Further, the strained relationship between Strauß and Bauer goes back to Bauer's first conservative period. Initially, Bauer was mostly concerned to demonstrate the literal truth of the New Testament and to debunk Strauß's heretical claims. He published a harsh critique of *Life of Jesus*. He also published various defenses of orthodox Hegelianism while he was a *Privatdozent* in Berlin, including a two-volume study of the Old Testament (*Kritik der Geschichte der Offenbarung: Die Religion des alten Testaments in der geschichtlichen Entwicklung ihrer Prinzipien dargestellt*, 1838).

³⁶⁹ He also studied under Schleiermacher and Neander in Berlin. Marheineke was his teacher [directed his PhD dissertation?].

³⁷⁰ An essay he submitted in response to a question posed by Hegel (*Über die Prinzipien des Schönen: De puchri principii—Eine Preisschrift*), received the Prussian Royal Prize in Philosophy as well as a favorable review by Hegel. The work was discovered by Moggach in 1992. The indirect personal relationship between Bauer and Hegel can be said to have continued after Hegel's death when, due to economic hardship, Bauer worked for Hegel's wife, after his death, preparing an edition of her husband's *Philosophy of Religion*.

At that time, Bauer was also the editor of the *Zeitschrift für spekulative Theologie*. Even after Bauer switched sides, however, the mutual resentment the two thinkers harbored against each other persisted until the end, revolving in the main around the problem of how exactly the historical origin of the gospel stories should be explained. For a while, Bauer and Strauß were both contributors to Ruge's *Hallische Jahrbücher*, but this collaboration was also characterized by heated conflict until Strauß extricated himself from the project and the discussion. What is important here is that Bauer's assaults on Strauß between 1835 and 1837, which had been commissioned by the editors of the *Berlin Jahrbücher*, were greatly welcomed by orthodox Hegelians and Pietists alike.

Soon, Bauer changed his position and aligned himself with the Young Hegelians, but he remained in an ambivalent relationship with them individually. However, there continued to be considerable disagreements between Bauer and other leading figures of the Hegelian Left. Bauer's disagreements with Strauß and Feuerbach can be usefully described as a product of his attempt to strike a balance between what he considered crude materialism and the outdated metaphysics, but the issues he had with Feuerbach were less acute (perhaps because they were part of his general objections to any philosophy that appeared to neglect the importance of consciousness) than those he had with Strauß. Strauß, it seems, was for Bauer what Bauer was for Marx. During his Young Hegelian period, Bauer viewed Strauß as hopelessly steeped in the old idealism, positing transcendent forces outside the realm of human beings and imbuing these abstract forces with subject-qualities. Bauer's battle with Strauß is significant because it illustrates that, to a large extent, the internal disputes among the Young Hegelians were over how best to develop a fully this-worldly critical philosophy.

By taking Strauß to task, Bauer revealed his own deep investment in this question. Therefore, in his work on the Synoptics, he chided Strauß for having constructed another version of Hegelian transcendent philosophy and for not being courageous enough. According to Bauer, Strauß was wrong to hold on to the notion that the four Gospels had been created independently, when in reality they had all borrowed from only one original. Of course, Bauer's counter-theory that there was only one independently created source and that the others were merely imitations effectively pulled the rug out from under the idea that there were four eye-witnesses. With only one left, it was easy to doubt the validity of the original too. However, Strauß's gravest error, according to Bauer, was to posit tradition (a kind of collective unconscious) and myth (such as millenarian expectations) as the ultimate cause of the biblical account. According to Bauer, tradition and myth do not have hands and therefore cannot make anything; only individuals can — in this case the authors of the Gospels. In a dramatic turn of events, then, Bauer's conservative rejection of Strauß's heretical demolition of traditional Christian dogma had transformed into a radical attack on Strauß's pantheist mysticism as not heretical enough.

Bauer ultimately went much further than that to argue that none of the gospels were accurate accounts of an actual historical person. In *The Religion of the Old Testament* (1838), Bauer developed an account of religious evolution that was actually quite similar to that of Strauß, albeit still based on the conviction that the letter of Scripture had to be a representation of historical fact. His Young Hegelian turn, however, became definitely manifest in the *Critique of the Gospel of John* (*Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte des Johannes*, 1840), where Bauer went beyond Strauß to assert that the gospels were not so much myths as narrative legitimations created by the

church. While he continued to hold on to the reality of the historical Christ as the son of God, Bauer challenged the conventional idea that this fourth gospel was the original gospel and, discussing especially John's particular employment of the Greek concept of *Logos* and the conditions the establishment of Christianity, he argued that John wrote it long after Jesus' time and the Synoptics. His sequel *Critique of the Synoptic Gospels* (*Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker*, 1841) extended the historical skepticism to the so-called synoptic gospels to maintain that all four were invented rather than factual. According to Rosen, it was with this work that "Bauer became the hero of the radical Hegelians."³⁷¹

The vehemence with which Bauer maintained that the only real historical agency rests with the individual characterizes all of his work. Contemporary cultural theory would likely dismiss Bauer's ideas as amounting to a "genius model" of society. However, his refusal to accept accounts of specific historical events that rely on amorphous concepts like the *Volk* has never lost its substantial value for critical theory. If Bauer took the notion of the concrete individual too far by imagining that the locus of historical events was the isolated creative mind, separated from society and structural forces, he was correct to chastise Strauß for abstracting from human practice in all its specificity and instead constructing anonymous forces acting on behalf of, or from behind of, particular subjects in particular historical situations. It is also important to note that Bauer's individualist interpretation was never primitive; he routinely stressed that he did not subscribe to a conspiracy theory. Just because the gospels were the literary creations of particular authors, these authors did not lie or intentionally deceive their readers. Even though Bauer made reference to the immediate, pragmatic political and religious

³⁷¹ Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx*, 58-9.

priorities that shaped the different accounts, he always took care to voice his disapproval of the rationalist notion of the priestly lie. In his view, the evangelists had not purposely falsified the truth; rather, they had merely provided legitimation for a historical account they believed to be accurate.³⁷²

The differences between Strauß and Bauer notwithstanding, the effect of their writings was equally powerful. The religious and political establishment saw them ushering in a new crisis of the Christian faith and viewed them as a serious threat to order and hierarchy—and justifiably so. Indeed, in some respects Bauer was much more “dangerous” than Strauß and Feuerbach because he rejected the notion of humanity as divine and of Christianity as having a true essence. Bauer did not view the existing state of affairs as a step in the process of the manifestation of God’s Kingdom on Earth, or as a moment in the man’s increasing approximation to God, but rather as a stage in the path to a fully earthly reconciliation of humanity with itself. His critique of theological dogma not only gave way to a thoroughgoing opposition to Christian culture as a whole, as it did in Feuerbach as well; further, it also issued in open resistance against the Prussian government. A critic of church and state, Bauer joined Ruge, who had spent five years in prison due to the discovery of his involvement in a conspiracy organized by one of the *Burschenschaften*, in orchestrating the voices of the Young Hegelians in the journal referred to above, the *Hallesche Jahrbücher für deutsche Kunst und Wissenschaft*, for which he wrote a number of polemical essays.

Bauer, unlike Marx, objected strongly to the idea of compromise out of pragmatic considerations. His idea of politics was that it was a struggle over principles. His

³⁷² See, for example, Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx*, 51 and 57. On the other hand, the later Bauer’s “great men theory” of history was certainly problematic in many ways.

contempt for irrational deception of all kinds was absolute. He believed in history-making power of “the terrorism of reason,”³⁷³ pitting the solitary critic against an ignorant and inert world. Subordinating practice to theory, Bauer insisted that concrete actions that implied or required a certain accommodation with the existing state of affairs defeat the purpose of radical negation, i.e. the destruction of the whole system. Of course, insofar as he identified concrete action with reform, he was right, but his dismissal of revolutionary action was real. Bauer accorded all the power to transform the world to theory, and when he began, toward 1844, to advocate a “pure criticism,” removed from the world, his philosophy ended in the kind of solipsism which Marx and many of his former friends took issue with.³⁷⁴ From Bauer’s perspective, however, this representation of his ideas would be wrong-headed. According to him, “critical criticism” is not shut off from reality and thus condemned to impotence; rather, its distance from the present lends it the power to inaugurate the future.

It is difficult to survey the enormous body of Bauer’s writings³⁷⁵, but what stands out is the close connection between Bauer’s disengagement from religion and his political extremism. Sidney Hook, even though otherwise quite unsympathetic toward Bauer,

³⁷³ See, for example, Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*, 95-97. For a good discussion of Bauer’s theological and political writings, see chapters 2 and 3 in the cited work.

³⁷⁴ Eventually coming to embody his ideal of complete withdrawal, Bauer ended up breaking with everyone, including *Die Freien*. His words that the critic “does not belong to any party, nor does he want to belong to any party—he is lonely, lonely in that he has immersed himself in opposition, lonely in that he has set himself apart” are emblematic of this attitude (cited in Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 200).

³⁷⁵ Bauer’s prolific career can be a daunting prospect for scholars. Moggach has counted around eighty published texts produced in the decade between 1838 and 1848 alone, many of which are lengthy treatises (Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer*, 2). While the emphasis of this chapter is on Bauer’s critique of religion, it is important to bear in mind that Bauer wrote a number of historical works and works on contemporary politics. I am referring here, for instance, to his multi-volume *History of the Politics, Culture and Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century* (*Geschichte der Politik, Kultur und Aufklärung des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 1843-45), the multi-volume *History of Germany and the French Revolution under the Rule of Napoleon* (*Geschichte Deutschlands und der französischen Revolution unter der Herrschaft Napoleons*, 1846), as well as his *A Guide to the Bismarck Era* (*Zur Orientierung über die Bismarck’sche Ära*, 1880) and *Disraeli’s Romantic Imperialism and Bismarck’s Socialist Imperialism* (*Disraelis romantischer und Bismarcks sozialistischer Imperialismus*, 1882).

explains the link between Bauer's atheism and political leftism as follows: "Bauer proceeded to carry over the critical attitude to other fields. He called his method atheistic because it denied any kind of doctrinal and institutional authority."³⁷⁶ His early work, including that for the *Zeitschrift für spekulative Theologie*, had been framed by the hope that the various theological schools of thought could be integrated due to their relation as the different moments of the absolute, but his resentment towards orthodox theology grew steadily until he finally divorced himself from the rehabilitative project altogether. His conflict with the academic establishment contributed to his new conviction that theology and philosophy were fundamentally at odds with each other, and that the former was really just a relic of a bygone era and needed to be ruthlessly negated and overcome.

The Good Cause of Freedom and My Own Affair marked the moment when Bauer declared himself comfortable with being called an atheist and with his thought considered blasphemy. Having lain to rest his effort to "Hegel the bible" and "bible Hegel," he declared all religion to be the result of human alienation.³⁷⁷ Claiming Hegel's system as a revolutionary philosophy in his famous *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment on Hegel, the Atheist and Anti-Christ* (1841), Bauer proclaimed God dead and philosophy's task the

³⁷⁶ Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*, 95.

³⁷⁷ Many of Bauer's later works repeated his ideas about religion as alienated consciousness. Beginning with his banned and destroyed *Christianity Exposed* (*Das entdeckte Christenthum*, 1843), his arguments became increasingly more far-reaching. To mention only a select few of his religious works, we will name *Critique of the Epistles of Paul* (*Kritik der paulinischen Briefe*, 1980-51), in which Bauer denied authenticity to a set of documents the Tübingen School had just declared authentic, and in his 1850-51 *Critique of the Evangelical Gospels and the History of their Origin* (*Kritik der Evangelien und Geschichte ihres Ursprungs*, 3 vols., 1850-51), he denied the historical existence of Jesus. (This conclusion was already present in his *Synoptics*, where he had asserted that it was impossible to discern a reality beyond the mediations of the authors.) Two more books followed on the same subject: *Philo, Strauß, and Renan and Primitive Christianity* (*Philo, Strauß und Renan und das Urchristenthum*, 1874) and *Christ and the Caesars: The Origin of Christianity in Roman Greece* (*Christus und die Cäsaren: Der Ursprung des Christenthums aus dem römischen Christenthum*, 1877), both of which advanced essentially the same position: that Christianity was derived not directly from Judaism but from Greek and Roman sources, specifically Hellenism and Stoicism. The idea that religion was an idealistic compensation for the deficiencies of the existing social order informed all of these texts. For a discussion of this problem, see, for instance, Zvi Rosen, "The Influence of Bruno Bauer on Marx's Concept of Alienation," *Social Theory and Practice* 1 (Fall 1970): 50-65.

destruction of the world as it is.³⁷⁸ It was Bauer's realization that worldly transformation had to involve the complete revolution of social and political institutions that made his philosophy more radical than Strauß's. Further, Bauer's emphasis on the rejection of all abstract universals was very close to Stirner's categorical denunciation of all "holies." This affinity set him apart from Feuerbach, however, and ultimately made him less radical than the latter. Bauer defined 'man' as a primarily spiritual being, as the subject of absolute consciousness. He did not have a concept of sensuousness, and even though he stressed the practical, material side of finite existence, the empirical being was absorbed into the ideal realm, which, under the name of "culture," remained wedded to Hegelian categories.

However, Bauer's insistence on the historical and material roots of mythical objectifications and on the principle of immanence gave his idealism a materialist twist that must be recognized. It is generally acknowledged that Bauer had a significant influence over the young Marx, and the two were in agreement on most issues until about 1843 when Marx became dissatisfied with the concept of "self-consciousness" and replaced it with more social and economic ones. Indeed, many of the early Marx's arguments about religious ideology appear to at least be partially based on Bauer's critique of Christianity. A well-known passage from one of Marx's early writings (*A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*) illustrates the affinities between his and Bauer's thinking at that time:

The foundation of irreligious criticism is: *Man makes religion*, religion does not make man. Religion is indeed the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself or has already lost himself against. But

³⁷⁸ Bauer's other book on Hegel was *Hegel's Teachings Concerning Religion and Art Considered from the Perspective of Faith* (*Hegel's Lehre von der Religion und Kunst von dem Standpunkte des Glaubens aus beurtheilt*, 1842). This work is argued to be the second part of *The Trumpet* and was also produced under Marx's collaboration.

man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the world of man*, state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an *inverted consciousness of the world*, because they are an *inverted world*. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the *fantastic realization* of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly the struggle against *that world* whose spiritual *aroma* is religion.

Religious suffering is at one and the same time the *expression* of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.

The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to *call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions*. The criticism of religion is therefore in *embryo* the *criticism of that vale of tears* of which religion is the *halo*.

Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower. The criticism of religion disillusioned man, so that he will think, act and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses, so that he will move around himself as his own true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself.

It is therefore the *task of history*, once the *other-world of truth* has vanished, to establish the *truth of this world*. It is the immediate *task of philosophy*, which is in the service of history, to unmask self-estrangement in its *unholy forms* once the *holy form* of human self-estrangement has been unmasked. Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*.³⁷⁹

McLellan has noted that especially the notion of religion as a false comfort, as the

“opium of the people,” and as the “imaginary flowers” wound around our real “chains”

are all borrowed from Bauer, down to the metaphors.³⁸⁰ Finally, Marx’s well-known

³⁷⁹ Marx, *Early Writings*, 244-45.

³⁸⁰ See McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 78-9. McLellan points out that Bauer uses the term “opium” several times in reference to religion, e.g. in *The Good Cause of Freedom*, but adds that the phrase was used frequently by the Young Hegelians and may ultimately have come from Hegel’s description of Indian religion. The phrase about the “imaginary flowers” and “the living flower” is contained in *The Synoptics*, and McLellan surmises that Bauer may have taken it from Rousseau. Finally, the expression “illusory sun” is also from Bauer. Of course, these terms may all have originated in the collaborative period of Marx and Bauer, which would make it difficult to attribute them exclusively to Bauer. Be this as it may, we can see that the Young Hegelian, and specifically the Bauerian, critique of religion had an influence on Marx’s thought. Whether or not McLellan is correct in his judgment that “Bauer’s influence was thus not something that Marx passed through and then completely left behind: it was permanently incorporated into

dictum that the critique of religion is the basis of all criticism may very well be Bauerian in inspiration. Of course, Marx ended up leaving the domain of the critique of religion and declared it as insufficient in and of itself. Unlike the other Young Hegelians, he realized that religion could not be criticized correctly unless it was understood in the context of its role in relation to the real conditions of existence.

Ultimately, Bauer's atheism remained spiritualist in the sense that he was less interested in the pressing social issues of the time than in what he perceived as a degraded mass consciousness. His notion was that conflicts in society were due to the fact truth had not established itself in people's minds and that once Man had lifted himself up "internally," all "external" problems were going to dissolve on their own. Hence, he advocated a program of critical enlightenment. Sidney Hook puts it well when he refers to Bauer's educational program as "social evangelism" and says that

Bauer and his school did not deny that specific social evils such as pauperism, crime, prostitution, etc., arose out of the material conditions of social life. But in consonance with his metaphysics, the material conditions of social life were themselves regarded as the product of a set of uncritical principles. It was only because those who ruled the destinies of the social world, as well as those who suffered this rule, were limited by their ignorance and ill-will, that social evils arose and persisted. The real source, then, of social evils was the lack of a rational, idealistic and critical attitude on the part of individuals. It is futile to attempt to revolutionise things before people's ideas, souls, or spirits were revolutionised. Indeed, things and all their evils were what they were *because* of human attitudes. Their significance and very existence depended upon consciousness. Things could be genuinely changed only by a revolution in human evaluating attitudes and not merely by reforms in the material structures and mechanisms of social life.³⁸¹

Hegel's absolute spirit was real for Bauer, and he continued to be a Hegelian in that he believed that history was the process of consciousness becoming aware of itself. The difference was that for Bauer consciousness was human self-consciousness, and the final

his way of thinking" (ibid., 80) is perhaps another matter.

³⁸¹ Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*, 104-5.

stage of consciousness, the end of history, was going to be realized in the future and through the person of the critic, not the philosopher. However, consciousness was a self-moving entity, a transcendent agent that acts above the heads of human subjects.³⁸² His spiritualism also resulted from the fact that Bauer, unlike Marx, was anxious about the transition from traditional to modern society. His contempt of the *Pöbel* was emblematic of his sense that base material interests, which came to dominate market society, were usurping the higher domain of the mind.³⁸³ His opinion that the masses, preoccupied with fulfilling their immediate needs, could not transcend that situation and understand it “critically,” i.e. theoretically, demonstrates his negative evaluation of anything material.³⁸⁴

Whatever we may say of Bauer’s politics, his philosophy was certainly a worldly one. It is true that Bauer was not a liberal in the strict sense of the term, even in his own time. He detested democracy and favored absolutism³⁸⁵, he supported the unity of church and state despite his express aim to demolish religion, he declared himself openly against the emancipation of the Jews, and he greeted the Revolution of 1848 with disdain, calling it a “fraud.” Brazill sums up Bauer’s anti-liberal stance when he explains,

The liberals supported the separation of church and state. Bauer, on the other hand, applauded the union of the two and the absorption by the state of the spiritual life of its citizens. For him the secular state was nonsense. The liberals generally favored some sort of franchise and exhibited some concern over the condition of the people. Bauer had disdain for the mass of people, for majority rule, for any such numerical principle that would swamp the power of the

³⁸² Bauer’s understanding of the role of human agency in history is not entirely consistent. Therefore, some sources indicate that he realized that history does not simply come to people and that people have to make history happen, most suggest that he held on to a kind of fatalism where the individual subject simply awaits and fulfills the goals of history.

³⁸³ Mah, *The End of Philosophy*, 80-2.

³⁸⁴ This view – that people could not possibly be critics of their own conditions of existence – was articulated particularly forcefully by Bauer in his *Vollständige Geschichte der Parteienkämpfe* (1849).

³⁸⁵ His exaltation of absolutism was linked to his celebration of Russia as the exemplar of a rational state. His position was in opposition to liberal constitutionalism (in particular its reliance on individualism, on the separation of the private and the public sphere, and on civil society as a collection of property owners).

independent critic. Popular rule in his mind was equal to ignorance and materialism, the destruction of culture, the end of the critical philosophy, and, hence, the denial of freedom.³⁸⁶

However, his reactionary position can be put into perspective by way of noting that the state he envisioned was based on reason and the masses he detested were the same public that had shown itself indifferent to his expulsion from Bonn.³⁸⁷ At his most radical moment, Bauer went further than most other German radical thinkers, denouncing his former claim that Hegel and Hegelianism were radical, arguing now that they were complicit with the *status quo* and that they created apologies for an intolerable state of affairs. He considered the Christian private religiosity more pernicious than any other but believed that human emancipation necessitated the universal freedom from all religion. In other words, Bauer was fiercely invested in the effort of turning theory toward humanity and away from otherworldly fantasies.

When Marx and Bauer were friends and collaborators, Bauer viewed theoretical critique as geared toward human freedom. As Rosen states, “until 1844 Bauer held views clearly aimed at changing reality.”³⁸⁸ “The terrorism of pure theory”³⁸⁹ that he advocated was opposed to metaphysical speculation and theological debate, even though not always effectively or adequately so. In assessing Bauer’s contribution to the Young Hegelian movement, it must be recognized that the call for “the end of philosophy” only gained

³⁸⁶ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 201.

³⁸⁷ This is Rosen’s argument (*Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx*, 6).

³⁸⁸ Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx*, 12.

³⁸⁹ Quoted in Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 199. For a while after 1844, Bauer continued to hold on to his concept of “pure criticism” despite the fact that the revolution it was going to launch did not materialize, and despite the fact that his brother and his close friend Szeliga had begun to wonder whether critique needed to recruit other elements of society to become effective (Edgar advocating underground elements, and Szeliga advocating reform from above). The problem was whether criticism in and of itself was powerful enough to bring about revolutionary action. However, Bauer ended up shifting together with Szeliga to the right, promoting a conservative constitutional monarchy. Eventually, he viewed the “great men,” rather than critical science, as the true agents of history.

force with him. As Karl Löwith has pointed out, Bauer and Stirner shared the notion that, while philosophy had moved history in the past, this was no longer the case in the present. With Feuerbach, Bauer believed that philosophy had to be overcome by critical theory, and Stirner probably took the idea from Bauer.³⁹⁰ Further, it was not only with Feuerbach but also with Bauer that the distinctly Young Hegelian notion of human self-alienation originated. Bauer's radical atheism inspired Ruge and the early Marx (before they moved on to Feuerbach), and especially Stirner, whose anti-humanist and anti-idealist approach in turn had a lasting impact on Marx. His atheism, while focused almost exclusively on the negation of religion, was also a full affirmation of history as a secular process, and of the present as an imperfect and deficient state of existence. Bauer's determined recouping of Hegel for the left set an extraordinary precedent in the history of radical thought, and his concept of the philosopher as "critic of the established order"³⁹¹ has long outlasted him.

Bauer and Hegel

*The Trumpet of the Last Judgment Against Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist (Die Posaune des Jüngsten Gerichts über Hegel den Atheisten und Antichristen, 1841)*³⁹² has been called "the *locus classicus* for the Young Hegelian view of Hegel."³⁹³ The work was

³⁹⁰ Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 107

³⁹¹ Stepelevich, *The Young Hegelians*, 184.

³⁹² In what follows, I will be using almost exclusively Stepelevich's edition (*The Young Hegelians*). The translation is that of George Elliot/Marian Evans, updated and revised by Marilyn Chapin Massy.

³⁹³ McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 53. Bauer scholar Moggach agrees and maintains that in this work, "Bauer formulates the classic leftist reading of Hegel" (*The Philosophy and Politics*, 101). There is at least one scholar who has disagreed with the notion that *The Trumpet* is a serious engagement with Hegel's philosophy or even a rigorous reduction of Hegelian philosophy to its atheist kernel; he has argued that the text cannot be considered a key text in relation to Bauer's philosophy because it was nothing but a denunciatory hoax. This position is motivated by an attempt to separate Marx and Bauer more decidedly. See Ruedi Waser, *Autonomie des Selbstbewußtseins*, specifically pages 27-36.

written by Bauer, probably under partial collaboration with Marx, and published anonymously. It was first attributed to Feuerbach, who voiced his protest, claiming that *The Trumpet* was pro Hegel, whereas he was anti Hegel.³⁹⁴ The work is generally considered a remarkable piece of polemic because Bauer pretends to be a rabid arch-Pietist whose rant about the new Antichrist exposes Hegel as a deeply subversive, dangerous philosopher.³⁹⁵ Of course, Bauer's aim was to radicalize the Young Hegelian movement by way of a radicalization of Hegel, and the text itself is what Moggach correctly calls a "fundamental theoretical statement."³⁹⁶

The text begins with a passage from the Old Testament, in which God promises to punish those who "will not recognize His Majesty, . . . who would raise themselves up and not mark that they are but men."³⁹⁷ Chastising the humans for their arrogance in thinking that He does not exist and they themselves are the true God, "[s]o saith the Lord: 'I will bring thee down'" (*The Trumpet*, 177). This warning was directed in particular at "the last, the worst, and the proudest enemy of the Lord," Hegelianism, which, according to Bauer under the guise of an infuriated cleric, was far "stronger" and insidious than even the French Revolution³⁹⁸, which had been contained by the Restoration. According to the enraged author, the rise of Hegel in Germany surpassed anything that had

³⁹⁴ Cited in McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 54.

³⁹⁵ Initially, the mock-sermon had many fooled, including perhaps both anti-Hegelians and Hegelians (see Rosen, *Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx*, 63, and Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics*, 100). Moggach, however, points out that Ruge, whom Rosen believes to have been deceived initially, actually "participated willingly in the charade" (ibid., 100; see also ibid., 240 n. 8).

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 15.

³⁹⁷ Bruno Bauer, "The Trumpet of the Last Judgement," in Stepelevich, *The Young Hegelians*, 177, hereafter cited parenthetically as *The Trumpet*.

³⁹⁸ The reference to the events in revolutionary and Napoleonic France is implicit but apparent in the second paragraph, which reads: "[T]hese 'Wild Men'—these people of the Antichrist—have dared to declare the non-existence of the Eternal Lord, and this in the full light of day, in the market, before all Christian Europe, in the light of the sun which has never shone upon such wickedness. They have practiced an idolatrous adultery with the Whore of Reason while they have murdered the Anointed of God. But Europe, once filled with Holy Zeal, strangled the Whore, and then bound itself into a Holy Alliance so as to cast the Antichrist into chains and to once again set up the eternal altars of the True Lord" (*The Trumpet*, 177).

happened in France because “he gave new foundation to the principles of Hell, and raised them into the power of a law” (ibid.).

Even more than Feuerbach, Bauer delights in pointing out the blasphemous and idolatrous effects of a radical Hegelian philosophy. Demonstrating that there is an essential continuity stretching from Hegel through the Old Hegelians to the Young Hegelians, Bauer—in this work—refrains from engaging the differences that had resulted in the dissolution of the Hegelian School and maintains that “fundamentally and in principle, if we go back to the actual teaching of the master, the latest disciples have added nothing new—they have only torn away the thin veil which briefly concealed the thought of the master and have revealed—shamelessly enough—the system in its nakedness” (*The Trumpet*, 178-9). Hegel, he writes, was “filled with hate against everything Godly and Consecrated,” and his disciples followed him in his “war against the One” (ibid., 178). If the Old Hegelians showed restraint in their critical consciousness, it was due to “chance circumstances.” However, those of “the younger school have openly cast away all godliness and modesty, and struggle openly against Church and State. They have inverted the cross and threaten to upset the throne itself” (ibid.).

Thus revealed to be anything but innocent, Hegel must be shown to have been inspired by the “Master of Deceit,” lest his “monstrously matured mob of disciples . . . that hideous mob freeing the bonds of dishonorable reason” leave Church and State “shaken to the core by such a hellish discharge” (*The Trumpet*, 178). Such are the exclamations of the incensed Pietist who offers the true believers the “shield of faith” against the “philosophic acid” that threatens to infect everything. Bauer *qua* fanatic priest

urges his readers not to be deceived and to see with him behind the “thin veil,” torn down by the Young Hegelians who have shown “the system in its nakedness,” none other than the “cunning of the old serpent, the same which brought our forebears to the Fall, which by devilish fabrication gave that thought the appearance of Christianity, Churchliness, and piety” (ibid., 179). He exhorts his readers to discern underneath the devout façade “the center point of this philosophy, its destruction of religion” (ibid.) and implores them to penetrate the two husks covering up the true core of Hegel’s philosophy: one, the appearance of theism, a residual but superficial and hence false theism that characterized the work of the Old Hegelians (including not only Göschel but also Strauß), and two, the appearance of pantheism, in order to discover the true atheist kernel. Only once these two hulls are cleared away, can we plainly see that,

This [the reduction of religion to the relationship of self-consciousness to itself] is the terrible, dreadful, religiously mortifying kernel of the system. Who partakes of this kernel is dead to God, for he holds God dead. Who eats of this kernel is deeper fallen than Eve, for she ate of the apple and Adam was seduced by her, and Adam hoped to be as God. But the disciple of the system, with sinful pride, has no wish to be as God, but only to be Ego = Ego, to be the blasphemous infinity, to win and to enjoy but the freedom and self-pleasure of self-consciousness. This philosophy wants no God, nor God as the heathen, it wants but man and his self-conscious and everything set towards its vain self-consciousness. (Ibid., 181)

Chapter four is titled “Hatred of the Established Order” and differs from the first three chapters in that it moves from an exposition of Hegel’s own destruction of these appearances to an elucidation of why this makes Hegel the most dangerous enemy of the social and political regime. Bauer’s argument is notably idealist, but it also contains an emphasis on the material side of human existence precisely because of its turn towards the *status quo* as a historical (that is, transitory) problem to be reflected on and changed. *Via* a facetious denunciation of Hegel’s elitism (“To Hegel, all men other than

philosophers are oxen. . . . He lacks all love for the common and honest man” [*The Trumpet*, 182]), Bauer, posing as his adversary, elaborates, apparently unwittingly, on the Young Hegelian vision of the role of philosophy in history: “But not only when an advance is to occur do philosophers have hands in the affair, but whenever the established order is to be disturbed, and here the positive forms, the institutions, the constitution, and religious statues are to collapse and fall. The philosophers are truly of a singular danger, for they are the most consistent and unrestrained revolutionaries. [In Hegel’s words, ‘p]hilosophy begins with the decline of the actual world’” (ibid., 182).³⁹⁹ The postulated connection between critical theory and historical transformation, which was to be criticized by Marx later, is thus made plain in Bauer’s writing. Bauer clearly did not view the laboring classes as revolutionary forces, nor did he have any compunction asserting the mental, and hence social, superiority of a knowledge elite, a critical “caste.” Finally, he did not attempt an analysis of labor, as Marx did.⁴⁰⁰ At the same time, he saw the need for change, and he saw change as the result of struggle.

Dispelling any uncertainties regarding the ambiguities in Hegel’s own thoughts on the relation of philosophy to external reality, Bauer comes down decisively in favor of Hegel’s affirmation of Mind as initiating the moment of negation. He quotes from Hegel’s work to provide evidence for his argument and then proceeds to make a rather interesting move correcting his fellow Young Hegelians in their allegations that Hegel had failed to transition to the question of how to practically revolutionize actuality. Bauer argues that while “[t]he mob of Young Hegelians would like to convince us that Hegel

³⁹⁹ The German word for “unrestrained” is here “rücksichtslos,” which could also be translated as “ruthless,” a term that was famously used by the early Marx in his “The Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing.”

⁴⁰⁰ One might be tempted to draw some tentative parallels here between Bauer’s radical thought and certain strands of post-Marxism (like *Wertkritik*).

has sunk himself within the folds of theory, and has not thought to lead this *theory* to *praxis*,” this is not true; Hegel had in fact “attacked religion with a hellish rage . . . [and] set forth upon the destruction of the established world” (*The Trumpet*, 183). Advancing what is a rather familiar claim nowadays, Bauer explains that ideas not only have real effects but are in and of themselves always-already material. Thus, he states: “But his *theory* is *praxis*, and for that very reason most dangerous, far-reaching and destructive. It is the revolution itself” (ibid.).

In another clever maneuver, Bauer once again papers over his disagreements with other radicals like Feuerbach, interpreting their attempt to distance themselves from Hegel as merely a plot designed to mislead the orthodox Christians and to distract them from realizing that their cause is a lost cause unless they become fully cognizant of the fact that “Hegel was a greater revolutionary than the total of all his disciples [and that t]he ax must be laid to him, he must be uprooted!” (*The Trumpet*, 183) Of course, it becomes apparent in the course of Bauer’s explanations of the Hegelian insight that every actuality, every government, every constitution, every institution reaches a temporal limit, that the cause of the Pietist must by logical, i.e. historical, necessity be a lost cause. The gap between finite reality and knowledge, between what is and what will be, is a historical fact that obliges theory to transform a world whose time has come.

Bauer returns to his discussion of philosophy as praxis and, quoting from Hegel, insists even more expressly that thought *become* action. This is qualitatively different from his later claims that thought *is* action. Thus, he states,

And so, a theoretical principle must not merely play a supportive role, but must come to the act, to practical opposition, to turn itself directly into praxis and action. . . . Hence it is not enough that the incitement to general revolt and “excitation is the highest service and highest activity of a teacher,” but the

opposition must be serious, sharp, thoroughgoing, unrestrained, and must see its highest goal in the overthrow of the established order.

And so philosophy must be active in politics, and whenever the established order contradicts the self-consciousness of philosophy, it must be directly attacked and shaken. Servitude, tutelage, is unbearable to the free spirit. (*The Trumpet*, 184)

We can easily see what Marx's objections were later going to be (not only to Bauer, therefore, but to his own perspective in *The Trumpet*, if he was in fact the co-author). The Marx of *The German Ideology* no longer agrees that it is the critic who holds the sole power to make the "final judgment upon the 'impudence' of the established and positive order . . . to give the signal for the ruin of the actual state of affairs" (ibid., 185).

Moreover, in 1845, Marx no longer assumes that critique issues from a place far removed from material interests, a place of disinterest, or—inasmuch as the interest in Reason can count as an interest—a transcendent place. Marx ended up spending a lot of time rebuking this notion as idealist and deeply conservative (a fact that was certainly borne out by Bauer's later work). But while the pitfalls of Bauer's conception of social transformation are evident when looked at through the lens of Marx's critique of *The German Ideology*, it would be false to allow this lens to be the only valid one. After all, radicalism can take more than one form, and Bauer's radicalism can be grasped only when sufficient attention is paid to the ways in which his understanding of historical change as fully worldly represented a key contribution to the emergence of a critical social theory in the nineteenth century.

The other chapters of *The Trumpet* consistently draw the philosophy of secular progress from Hegel. Condemning (and thus praising) Hegel's thought as an extension of Jacobin terror, Bauer produces a Hegel who may have been foreign to Hegel himself, but that does not mean that his reading was a *misreading*. Bauer drew mostly on Hegel's

lectures on the *Philosophy of Religion* (the second edition of which Bauer himself had just prepared), as well as on the *Philosophy of History* and on the *History of Philosophy* in his attempt to extract the inner truth from the system. In fact, Moggach points out that “Bauer’s revolutionary Hegel is not . . . an entirely fictitious creation” and that there are real connections between the Hegel of the *Posaune* and the young Hegel.⁴⁰¹ One of these parallels may be the critique of liberal reformism, which Bauer elaborated in his subsequent writings in the 1840s. His stress on the principle of conflict and his theory of the necessary exacerbation of contradiction before the advent of real transformation is certainly a step removed from Hegel’s more conciliatory framing of the dialectic, but it is also very much in keeping with Hegel’s concept of rupture, finitude, and destruction as the condition of final rapprochement. Lastly, the connection between religious and political critique in Bauer is profoundly Hegelian. The negation of Christianity as the paradigmatic expression of human alienation is directly tied to a negation of all positivity, which, as its most radical, is a call for the overthrow of the existing institutions. In the section on “The Destruction of Religion,” Bauer places Hegel unambiguously in the legacy of the Enlightenment: Claiming that “Hegel goes after Religion just as a

⁴⁰¹ Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics*, 101 and 104. Moggach criticizes Rosen for arguing that Bauer’s portrayal of Hegel was based on misunderstandings and fraught with error and negligence (ibid., 241 n. 13). In contrast, Moggach holds rather convincingly that if Bauer attributed to Hegel a view of the historical process that was “not consonant” with Hegel’s own view, it was because Bauer was “not attempting to be consistent with Hegel’s own explicit intentions” (100-1). However, what Bauer says about the *implicit* meaning of Hegel’s philosophy is, in Moggach’s eyes, correct. In effect, Moggach repudiates the often made claim that Bauer’s Hegelianism was hardly true to Hegel, that in fact it was more of a fusion of Kant and Fichte. The notion that Moggach successfully proves wrong in his detailed exegesis of Bauer’s texts is that Bauer abandoned dialectical thinking in favor of antithetical thinking. His further specification that “[w]e can . . . identify a consistent core in his work throughout the 1840’s, in the Hegelian idea of the unity of thought and being” (ibid., 5) gives credence to this notion. At the same time, Moggach makes it clear that the “true” Hegel discovered by Bauer was only one of several Hegels: the revolutionary Hegel. Citing Lukacs’ *The Young Hegel*, Moggach states: “This historical and critical idealism, which the *Posaune* attributes to Hegel, is revolutionary: It affirms the rights of free self-consciousness against any positive institution that cannot justify its existence before rational thinking, against, state, religion, hierarchy, and subordination” (104).

Frenchman.”⁴⁰² he renews Hegel’s case in favor of reason and against Schleiermacher’s theology of feeling.

Anthropology versus Theology

While Bruno Bauer’s Hegelianism was materialist only in the sense that it was resolutely secular and humanist, Ludwig Feuerbach has become known as a direct precursor of Marxian materialism. Marx’s turn toward a sensuous actuality was occasioned by the influence of Feuerbach’s naturalist critique of idealism, and Feuerbach’s “reduction” of religion to its earthly basis was decisive in Marx’s transition from the critique of religion to the critique of its earthly basis. And yet, retrospectively, it is important to recognize that a discussion of Feuerbach as a materialist requires some qualifications. As contemporary critics have pointed out, Feuerbach’s anthropological philosophy always remained infused with an ahistorical spiritualism that did not lend itself to a revolutionary politics. For one, he insisted that the true Christ was humanity, not the person of ‘God the Savior’, but he retained the notion that human existence has a meaning and that this meaning resides in a mystical essence. For another, Feuerbach remained throughout his work ambivalent about specific instances of practical action, casting the moment of transformation into an ever receding, and hence never arriving, point in the future. It is the goal of the following discussion to throw some light on these ideological aspects of Feuerbach’s thinking while emphasizing its radical impulse and implications.

⁴⁰² Bruno Bauer, *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment Against Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist: An Ultimatum*, Studies in German Thought and History 5, ed. by Lawrence Stepelevich (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1989), 143.

Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach (1805-1872), who has since become the single most well-known representative of the Young Hegelian movement, began his short academic career as a student of Karl Daub at Heidelberg. He was introduced to the Hegelian notion of the identity between metaphysics and logic, and in abandoning theology for philosophy, he almost immediately developed a critical attitude toward orthodox Hegelian thought. From the outset, there was no question that Feuerbach would reject the epigonal project of faithful exegesis, reproduction, and explication and engage in a comprehensive leftist critique of Hegel.⁴⁰³ Feuerbach went far beyond his predecessors' doubts that the thinker, once privy to the truths of a philosophical science, can continue to tolerate the inferior expressions of popular religious practice. With a decisively negative response to this problem, Feuerbach launched a full-scale attack on Christianity, arguing in *Thoughts on Death and Immortality (Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit, 1830)* that the Reformation had inaugurated a particularly vicious cult of personality (the ultimate personality, the divine personality of Jesus) which was not displaced by the Enlightenment but fortified through the rationalist subjective idealism of the moral imperative.

Thoughts also marked the untimely end of Feuerbach's career. It was essentially an expansion of the ideas Feuerbach had developed in his dissertation titled *De ratione una, universali, infinita*. Even though he had studied in Berlin for two years, mainly under Hegel, he turned in his dissertation in 1828 at the University of Erlangen, where he received his doctorate. Feuerbach also sent a copy to Hegel. *Thoughts* was published two years later, anonymously. Almost immediately, Feuerbach was discovered as the author,

⁴⁰³ McLellan is less convinced of this, as he insists on arguing that "Feuerbach thought of himself as Hegel's direct disciple" (*The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 86). For a similar position, see Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 144.

and the stir caused over it was the reason Feuerbach lost his teaching post as *Privatdozent* at the University of Erlangen.

The work's main objective was a refutation of the doctrine of personal immortality, but its implications were far-reaching. Feuerbach argued that immortality—that of the spirit of humanity—existed, but the individual life was, until the moment of death, essentially finite and bound to the limits of this world. His point was a call on his fellow humans to turn towards this world and to aid in its progress, rather than seek illusory consolation in a life after death. This critique served him as a basis for developing his theory of alienation, according to which humans had renounced their worldly essence as historically contingent and socially conditioned, limited living beings, and projected it into a transcendent realm, which cannot be realized and must thus be empty. In Feuerbach's mind, an end had to be put to this situation, and the role of philosophy consisted in effecting change that would restore in people a deep sense of their inevitably constrained and finite but concrete and real earthly existence with all its limitations and possibilities.

The literature shows that there is some degree of disagreement over the Hegel-Feuerbach relationship and Feuerbach's materialism. While John Edward Toews observes that within the context of Young Hegelianism, Feuerbach's philosophy was unique not so much because of its humanism (since that is what he shared with Bauer and the others) but because of its materialism⁴⁰⁴, Brazill appears to view any such suggestion as an insult, rejecting the "charge" and adamantly contending that there was no "real conflict" between Feuerbach's materialism and Hegel's or Bauer's idealisms.⁴⁰⁵ It seems

⁴⁰⁴ Toews, *Hegelianism*, 327.

⁴⁰⁵ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 154.

that this difference in opinion has everything to do with whether Feuerbach is considered primarily a Hegelian or a proto-Marxian thinker. This question in turn is linked with the problem of how to assess the distance between Feuerbach and his teacher. While many, as I have already pointed out, tend to emphasize the difference, others maintain that Feuerbach did not break with the master, at least not until the publication of *The Essence of Christianity* (*Das Wesen des Christenthums*, 1841). These two positions may not be totally at variance with each other since it was precisely through a radical critique of Hegel that Feuerbach believed to be developing the Hegelian system in its authentic form.

However, insofar as there is a genuine tension between the critical and the epigonal Feuerbach, it is probably most helpful to consider that this tension was internal to Feuerbach's work. Löwith appears to say as much when he states that even though the early Feuerbach appropriated Hegel from the beginning in ways that anticipated his mature materialism and marked his eventual detachment from his teacher, he was also genuinely "at home" in Hegel's philosophy (*From Hegel to Marx*, 73). McLellan makes a similar argument by maintaining that there was a shift in Feuerbach's relation to Hegel. Whereas before 1839, Feuerbach had framed his objections to Hegel's identity philosophy as more or less minor revisions, after 1839, he placed his own critique in the context of a much more sweeping disagreement with speculative philosophy, which he now differentiated from science. McLellan specifically points out that the early editions of *The Essence of Christianity* were decidedly more idealist and more orthodox in their Hegelianism (upholding, for example, the identity of religion and philosophy and the centrality of reason as the driving force of history) than later editions, and that in the

course of his intellectual development Feuerbach increasingly rejected the traces of traditional idealism present in his first writings.⁴⁰⁶ McLellan further suggests that *The Essence of Christianity* was initially received by his Left Hegelian colleagues as “one radical commentary on Hegel among others” and that it was only with Feuerbach’s increasingly vocal distance from Hegel that the work became retroactively imbued with more critical potential than it actually had.⁴⁰⁷ According to McLellan, the shift was real: “In the thirties Feuerbach was an idealist and a Hegelian and in the late forties he became, and remained, a materialist, but in the intervening years he attempted to hold the very difficult balance between the two.”⁴⁰⁸ Feuerbach’s expressly antagonistic essay “On the Criticism of Hegelian Philosophy” published in 1839 attests to this reality.

To wit, Feuerbach himself commented on his former commitment to Hegel. In his effort to both come to terms with and explain his early discipleship, and in particular with his orthodox Hegelian rebuttal of Karl Friedrich Bachmann’s *Antihegel* (1835)⁴⁰⁹ in the *Jahrbücher*, Feuerbach did not only argue that at the time his stance *vis-à-vis* Hegel was not yet mature enough for him to give voice to the “Anti-Hegel” within himself, he also claimed that his defense of Hegel against Bachmann was never an unconditional acquiescence but rather a temporary alliance made necessary by the presence of a common opponent.⁴¹⁰ This means that even if the extent to which Feuerbach had always distanced himself from Hegel was and still is not fully appreciated⁴¹¹, Feuerbach’s *oeuvre*

⁴⁰⁶ McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, 90.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁰⁹ Bachman, incidentally, had been part of the first group of Hegel’s students during Hegel’s Jena years. At first fiercely devoted to Hegelian science, he eventually came to disregard logic in favor of a more intuitive reality, namely that of the “heart,” based on ethical and religious “feeling.”

⁴¹⁰ See, for example, Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, 73-74.

⁴¹¹ See, for example, Feuerbach’s claim that his philosophy “... can only be understood in the light of this opposition [to Hegel] ...” (cited in McLellan, *The Young Hegelian and Karl Marx*, 94).

is in fact characterized by an internal shift. The fact that Feuerbach eventually expressed serious reservations about his first book, *Thoughts about Death and Immortality*, the work that had caused such an uproar and cost him his university career, is an indication that it was through a reexamination and harsh appraisal of his earlier work, and specifically of its reliance on a kind of mystical pantheism, that Feuerbach came to move in a more radical direction.

One might, then, comprehend Feuerbach's philosophy as consisting of two phases, one belonging to the old Left and the other figuring prominently in the formation of the new Left. The shift translated into an ever more expressly atheist critique of Hegel and his claims to being the incarnation of philosophy self-comprehended, the end of history. Hegel's idealism had to be viewed as an alienated form of reason, whose gravest error was its refusal to truly account for sensuous reality. Feuerbach's insistent argument that empirical matters, in all their immediacy, had to be acknowledged and explained in theory was tied to his critique of all kinds of transcendentalism, philosophical or theological. His arguments that Christianity had already become conscious of the human essence of God and of religion (through its invention of Jesus Christ), and that theology and philosophy just needed to keep up with history and openly concede that the true Christ was humanity, were increasingly geared beyond the mere abnegation of the existence of supernatural subjects and toward the affirmation of an ethical politics based on the universality of the human *Gattungswesen*.

Feuerbach is known today mostly as the philosopher who stood religion on its feet, on its anthropological basis.⁴¹² His theory of alienation, while derived from Hegel

⁴¹² At the end of Part One of *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), Feuerbach states: "Unsere wesentlichste Aufgabe ist hiermit erfüllt. Wir haben das außerweltliche, übernatürliche und übermenschliche Wesen Gottes reduziert auf die Bestandteile. Wir sind im Schlusse wieder auf den Anfang zurückgekommen. Der Mensch ist der Anfang der Religion, der Mensch der Mittelpunkt der Religion, der

and owing some of its revised form to Bauer's notion of alienated consciousness, is generally recognized to have been Feuerbach's unique contribution to the development of a materialist critique of all ideal (metaphysical) constructs as false (self-)objectifications. The ideas, outlined in *The Essence of Christianity*, are generally familiar: Feuerbach establishes 1) that the predicates of God, i.e. the qualities of the personal God of Christianity are anthropomorphisms (that is, that divine forms resemble uniquely human forms because the former have been created by Man in the image of the latter); 2) that since a subject without predicates is a non-existence, God cannot exist as an individual being; and 3) that any belief to the contrary falsely attributes the universal and, in this sense divine, human predicates onto an imaginary subject, thereby conferring subject status on the attributes themselves and hence inverting the subject-predicate relationship. By thus crossing out the place of the supernatural Other, Feuerbach was fully in agreement with Bauer. Unlike Bauer, however, he insisted on the essentially sensual nature of human "species being." While they shared the sense that the critique of consciousness was the urgent task of modernity, Feuerbach did not leave it at that but went further to declare the belief in the independence of spirit a thing of the past.

He may not have been the only Hegelian, intent on putting primary weight on the side of the objectively and experientially real⁴¹³, but his particular approach to emphasizing the empirical had a profound impact on the Young Hegelian philosophy. Notably, he managed to revitalize, and rescue from ill repute, the materialist tradition of thought in Germany. He did this by contending that he was not a materialist in the ordinary, or what he called the "vulgar," way. Specifically, he distanced himself from

Mensch das Ende der Religion" (283). Later, in his *The Essence of Religion (Das Wesen der Religion*, 1846), Feuerbach attributed the origin of religion not so much to man but to nature.

⁴¹³ In fact, Friedrich Richter had published his *Teaching of the Last Things* in 1833, and this book was remarkably similar to Feuerbach's work.

mechanistic forms of materialism, including the French empiricism that he and many of his contemporaries considered primitive. Feuerbach maintained that this form of materialism was “stupid” or “brainless”⁴¹⁴ because it was not supplemented with an appropriate appreciation of the importance of [self-]consciousness and did not consider that consciousness makes a *qualitative* difference between humans and animals. Feuerbach believed the Germans to be capable of producing a more sophisticated materialism, by which he had in mind a union of French materialism and German idealism, which was not an idiosyncratic idea but a common notion among liberal and radical thinkers in 19th century Germany. Feuerbach aspired to overcome the Cartesian dualism by showing that matter and mind are inextricably tied together in the human species and that neither is external to the other. Indeed, his humanism hinged to a large extent on the argument that substance and subjectivity always depend on one another and therefore cannot be understood separately. This allowed him to criticize Hegel, who had still viewed substance and subjectivity as distinct and unequal domains. Thus challenging Hegel’s assumption that universal consciousness was abstract and *a priori* and anchoring it firmly with finite and particular objectivity, Feuerbach’s philosophy proposed to hold “the keys to a real theory and practice.”⁴¹⁵

Feuerbach’s Hegel critique went beyond that of Strauß and Bauer in several ways. First, his religious criticism was concerned not with the intricacies of theological dogma

⁴¹⁴ The German word is “geistlos” (without sense or spirit), and it is italicized in the original (*Das Wesen*, 39 n 1).

⁴¹⁵ The passage from which this quote is taken (translation mine) reads as follows: “Wir sollen also – ist die Lehre der Fabel – die Bestimmungen und Kräfte der Wirklichkeit, überhaupt die wirklichen Wesen und Dinge nicht wie die Theologie und spekulative Philosophie zu willkürlichen Zeichen, zu Vehikeln, Symbolen oder Prädikaten eines von ihnen unterschiednen, transzendenten, absoluten, d.h. abstrakten Wesens machen, sondern *in* der Bedeutung nehmen und erfassen, welche sie *für sich selbst* haben, welche identisch ist mit ihrer Qualität, mit *der* Bestimmtheit, die sie zu dem macht, was sie sind – so erst haben wir die Schlüssel zu einer *reellen Theorie und Praxis*” (Feuerbach, *Das Wesen*, 28.)

or with the problem of history versus myth in the biblical account but rather with Christian belief in general and Protestantism in particular. Thus, in a commentary on some of Luther's statements, he says, "The knowledge of Christ, when dissolved into its truth, is the knowledge of Man. Christ is Man in general. He is what every human individual *should be* and, at least according to his general human nature, *could be*, imagined as a real human being. Be what Christ is! means: Be human!"⁴¹⁶ By thus proposing that people believe in an entirely new truth, far removed from religion in the conventional sense, he greatly extended the scope of the Young Hegelian critique, disappointing any hopes that the new radical philosophy could be contained within a narrow theologico-scholastic debate. But Feuerbach's secularism was also more pronounced than Bauer's or Strauß's because he refused to cling to the "master" in his theoretical elaborations. As a result, he remained unimpressed with Hegel's contention that history was a mere "means" by which an extraneous *Geist* came to realize itself; rather, he consistently argues that earthly events were the real movement of a progressive self-realization of a living, breathing, loving, and willing sensuous "natural" being imbued with reason in a worldly community.

In contrast to Strauß and Bauer, then, Feuerbach was decidedly more post-Hegelian. Brazill expresses this when he says that "[f]rom Strauß to Feuerbach . . . there

⁴¹⁶ Feuerbach, "Merkwürdige Äußerungen Luthers nebst Glossen," *Gesammelte Werke* 9 (420-21). Further down, he exclaims in exaggerated pity for the "foolish" Christian: "Der neue Adam, d.h. der Christ, zeucht dich in den Himmel zu den unsichtbaren Dingen hinauf, aber der alte Adam, d.h. der Mensch, zeucht dich wieder zurück auf die Erde zu den sichtbaren Dingen. Unglückseliger Christ! Was bist du für ein zwiespältiges, zerrissenes Wesen! Weil das Sichtbare das Zeitliche, willst du von ihm dich nicht fesseln lassen, willst du dein Herz nicht daran hängen? Also weil die Blume im Herbste verwelkt, willst du im Frühling an ihrer Anschauung dich nicht weiden, weil der Tag nicht immer währt, willst du dich nicht an dem Lichte der Sonne erfreuen, willst du lieber in ewiger Finsternis dein Auge vor den Herrlichkeiten dieser Welt verschließen? Oh, du Tor! Bist du denn nicht selbst ein zeitliches Wesen? Warum willst du also nicht bei dem bleiben, was deinesgleichen, deines Wesens ist? Und was bleibt dir denn übrig, wenn du das Zeitliche, das Sichtbare hinwegnimmst? Nichts bleibt dir übrig als – das Nichts. Ewig, Tor, ist nur das Tod, aber zeitlich ist das Leben" (ibid., 422).

was a subtle shift of emphasis from God to man, a shift in the nature of humanism that symbolized the direction taken by the Young Hegelians.”⁴¹⁷ However, despite Feuerbach’s persistent opposition to conservative fundamentalism, especially Stahl’s version of it, and his attacks on its handmaiden, the “*theosophic posse* of the *philosophical Cagliostro* of the nineteenth century,”⁴¹⁸ Schelling, his own retreat from rationalism (via “feeling” and “love” and his notion of the holy nature of human being) brought him quite close to the Romanticism that he otherwise pilloried. It is true that Feuerbach routinely emphasized the value of the “cold water” of empirical science and historical analysis over against metaphysical abstractions, but claiming that humankind was divine and his own philosophy a “new religion,” he was unable to defend himself effectively against Stirner. Feuerbach’s repeated assurances that he was the first to grasp “the absolute essence as sensuous essence, the *sensuous essence as absolute essence*”⁴¹⁹ and this essence as the real individual, could not but remain fraught with the metaphysical weight of the notion of a universal, transhistorical essence. Had it not been for his abstract and aesthetic conception of Man, Feuerbach’s communism would have been more fully secular.

We can conclude, therefore, that Feuerbach has rightly been accused of leaving intact the divine attributes in the same breath that he destroyed the church, faith, and the god of religion. Having charged Protestantism with instilling a chronic fear of death in people and having urged people to find consolation and peace in the fact that there can be no existence but finite existence, he nonetheless seems to have feared a kind of spiritual

⁴¹⁷ Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, 136.

⁴¹⁸ Feuerbach, *Das Wesen*, 34; emphasis in original.

⁴¹⁹ This quote is from Feuerbach’s response to Stirner’s critique of *The Essence* in *The Ego* (see “Über das ‘Wesen des Christentums’ in Beziehung auf den ‘Einzigsten und sein Eigentum’,” *Gesammelte Werke* 9, 431.

death as a result of recognizing nothing apart from “naked” reality and, like Strauß, was hence keen on promoting a “new faith,” a source of hope and confidence. This and the fact that his project of liberation through demystification was based on the notion that human self-consciousness has to raise itself or be raised to a higher level⁴²⁰ demonstrates that Feuerbach’s critical theory fell short in important ways. The failures of his philosophical materialism are also evident in the fact that it never transitioned to an explicitly political level. Personally as well as intellectually, Feuerbach remained isolated and uninvolved with the practical political and social concerns of his contemporaries throughout his life. Like Bauer and Strauß, he was forced out of academia, and, with the prospects of ever finding secure employment having dwindled to nil, he retired with his wife to the South German village Bruckberg near Ansbach. Moreover, unlike Bauer and Strauß, Feuerbach never had any formal or otherwise intensive contacts with the Young Hegelians, even though he published vigorously in his friend Ruge’s *Hallesche Jahrbuecher*, and he took very little active part in public life in general. His short and remarkably unremarkable tenure in the National Assembly, where he seemed unhappy with his post and was exceedingly quiet appears to have been the only ripple in the otherwise fairly still waters of his life in practical politics.

With that said, the revolutionary ideas in Feuerbach’s work, after 1839 especially, were unambiguously committed to a critical materialism. Specifically his two essays or pamphlets titled “Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie,”⁴²¹ published in Ruge’s *Anekdoten* in 1843, and “Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft,” published the same

⁴²⁰ In a letter to Ruge (in response to his invitation to contribute to the *Jahrbücher*), in fact, Feuerbach argued that political action was not always appropriate and that conditions had to be ripe for thought to effectively translation into action. In 1843, Feuerbach claimed that this moment of transition had not been reached in Germany and that the power of ideas (“poison”) should come before any acts of violence (“fire and sword”).

⁴²¹ The original title had “Reformation,” rather than “Reform.”

year, were directly speaking on the subject of how to develop a new scientific philosophy, rather than on religious issues only, which is probably why they had a deeper impact on the Young Hegelians than his *Essence*. These two writings have a revolutionary tone that resonated strongly with the Left Hegelians and made Feuerbach a leading figure among them. Feuerbach's influence on Marx has, of course, been the subject of many discussions, but it should be noted that Hess and particularly Engels, who was also more interested than Marx in the critique of theology, were fundamentally impressed with Feuerbach. In his early works, such as the *Paris Manuscripts*, Marx repeatedly refers to and praises Feuerbach for founding a materialist science of society. It has been recognized that Marx applied Feuerbach's critique of religion to Hegel's political philosophy as having inverted the subject-predicate relationship. Both Hess and Marx employed Feuerbach's interpretation of the alienation concept in the area of economics. Marx also took from Feuerbach the notion of the fusion of the materialist and idealist traditions and his call for the end of philosophy. To see why Feuerbach should have been such a critical influence on Marx, we must engage his work directly.

The Philosophy of the Future

Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy begins by asserting that the concept of immanence in Hegel's "speculative theology" is essentially no different than the concept of transcendence in ordinary theology because while the former seeks the divine essence in this world and the latter projects it into another world, both rely on the notion of a divine essence.⁴²² This is so because "[t]he absolute or infinite of speculative

⁴²² I will use Stepelevich's edition of the text, a translation by Daniel Dahlstrom. The work is included in Stepelevich's *The Young Hegelians*, 156-171.

philosophy is, psychologically considered, nothing other than something not determined, the indeterminate – the abstraction from everything determined, supposed as an essence distinguished from this abstraction but at the same time re-identified with it. Historically considered, however, it is nothing other than the old theological-metaphysical entity or non-entity which is *not* finite, *not* human, *not* material, not determined, and *not* created – the pre-worldly nothing, supposed *as act*.⁴²³ According to Feuerbach, Hegelian philosophy is not much more than an up-to-date version of theology because it too doubles “the *simple, self-identical essence* of nature and the human being” in order to then declare its ultimate unity again: “to mediate forcibly what was forcibly separated” (*Theses*, 158). Hegel’s logic parades under the mask of reason but in reality performs the same gesture of traditional theology, positing thought as outside of or prior to living humanity. This is how it too is *Gespensterglaube* (belief in ghosts) and aids in the self-alienation of humankind. Because it separates absolute from subjective spirit, it abstracts, and “[t]o abstract’ means to suppose the *essence* of nature *outside nature*, the *essence* of the human being *outside the human being*, the *essence* of thinking *outside the act of thinking*” (ibid., 159).

Conceiving his own philosophy of non-alienated being as the complete negation of Hegelian philosophy, Feuerbach maintains that the finite and the determined are the truth of the infinite and the undetermined. Thus, he praises art, for example, for knowing “that the *finite* is the *infinite*” and for grasping “a *determined, actual* essence as the *highest, the divine* essence” (*Theses*, 159). Even more expressly, he insists that “[t]he task of true philosophy is not to know the infinite as the finite but rather the finite as *not* finite, as the infinite . . . [i.e.] not to suppose the finite in the infinite but rather the infinite in the

⁴²³ Ibid., 157; hereafter cited parenthetically as *Theses*.

finite” (ibid., 160). He thereby effectively criticizes the “[p]hilosophy which derives the finite from the infinite or the determined from the undetermined [and] *never arrives at the true position of the finite and determined*” (ibid.). With a disarming sort of simplicity, he inverts the order of primacy and asks: “Is not, therefore, the *determined*, rather than the undetermined, what is primary” (ibid., 161)? Feuerbach insists that sensuousness precedes the concept: “Before you think the quality, you *feel* the quality. The *suffering* precedes the thinking” (ibid.). He pleads against the “mystified” and “distorted” procedure of speculation in favor of an understanding of “*true objective* reality” (ibid.) and asserts forcefully that “[p]hilosophy is the knowledge of *what is . . . what is such as it is*” (ibid., 162).

In a brief summary of his arguments about subjects and predicates in *The Essence*, Feuerbach also reiterates his contention that a subject without predicates is not a real subject and does not exist. He ties this line of thinking directly, albeit in passing, to a discussion of praxis and politics:

The negation of time and space in metaphysics, in the essence of things, has the most deleterious practical consequences. Only someone who *everywhere* takes a stand in space and time has also *tact* and *practical understanding* in life. Time and space are the first criteria of praxis. A people which excludes time from its metaphysics and sanctifies the eternal, i.e. *abstract*, existence detached from time, as a consequence excludes time also from its politics and sanctifies the anti-historical principle of stability, a principle contrary to right and reason. (*Theses*, 162)⁴²⁴

Speculative philosophy, in other words, is guilty of thinking development without time, which must remain an abstract notion of development. (This is an interesting argument in light of the fact that Feuerbach’s philosophy is generally characterized by, and criticized for, its lack of attention to history.) Moreover, speculative philosophy is guilty of

⁴²⁴ The revised version reads more accurately: “Only someone who *everywhere* maintains a position of time and space has also *tact* and *practical understanding* in life.”

thinking material reality without space. Spinoza, according to Feuerbach, had conceived of matter only as an attribute of substance, but not as limited and concrete. Hegel has repeated this mistake, along with Schelling, and passed over that which resists philosophy, the “passive principle,” the “principle of sensualism,” which is “at odds with philosophy and opposed to abstract thinking” (ibid., 163). What this means for the philosophy of the future is that “the philosopher must bring into the *text* of philosophy what Hegel relegated to mere *remarks* . . . Genuine philosophy has to begin not *with itself*, but with its *antithesis*, with *what is not philosophy*” (ibid., 163-4).

Feuerbach is adamant that in true philosophy “the *anti-scholastic, sanguine principle of French sensualism and materialism* unite with the *scholastic stodginess of German metaphysics*,” that “[t]he true philosopher, the philosopher *identical with life and human being* must be of *Franco-German* descent” (*Theses*, 164), the mother being French and the father being German⁴²⁵, but he argues equally explicitly that empiricism should be the basis of the new philosophy. He maintains that this new philosophy should not be a mechanical one, that it would not be “one-sided” but privilege both “organs” equally: the head (thinking) *and* the heart (intuition). However, methodologically, Feuerbach persists that matter should be the beginning, mind the end of philosophy. The reason for this is because “[b]eing is *subject* and *thinking* a *predicate*. . . . Thinking

⁴²⁵ The gendered dimensions of the nineteenth-century critique of materialism become evident here. “Pure materialism” was identified with inferior feminine qualities. Feuerbach’s critique of Schelling, which in effect is much more unsympathetic (and hence is couched in sexist language) than his critique of Hegel is emblematic of this fact. Consider, for example, this statement:

Hegel represents the masculine principle of self-sufficiency and of self-activity, in short, the idealistic principle. Schelling represents the feminine principle of receptivity and of impressionability, in short, the materialistic principle. . . . Hegel lacks *intuition*, *Schelling the power of thought and determination* [sic]. Schelling is a thinker only in *general*, but when it comes to a thing in particular, to something determined, he lapses into the somnambulism of the imagination. For Schelling rationalism is only a *disguise*, irrationalism the *truth* (*Theses*, 165-6).

At the same time, it is also noteworthy that Feuerbach’s concept of the heart is not the principle of belief, as opposed to reason, but rather the principle of disbelief, the “antitheological,” “unbelieving, atheistic principle.”

comes from being but being does not come from thinking. Being comes from itself and through itself" (ibid., 167). This is unambiguous and consistent, though obviously metaphysical in its retention of the ontological categories "thinking" and "being."⁴²⁶

Rather adeptly, Feuerbach further employs the Hegelian dictum that religion and philosophy are formally different but essentially the same, arguing that idealist philosophy is indeed merely an extension of theology: "*The Hegelian philosophy is the last place of refuge and the last rational support of theology*" (*Theses*, 167). Identical both in form and content, they have been opposed to "flesh and blood" (ibid., 163). What Feuerbach wishes to oppose to both is an atheist "true religion," which may at first glance seem like an oxymoron but was in fact the logical conclusion of Feuerbach's humanist approach which he called "anthropotheism." Feuerbach wanted to correct the distortion through which humanity had forgotten that it was itself the only real object of commitment and allegiance. He did not want to be considered a nihilist and rejected the idea that life has no meaning; rather, he contended that meaning is neither transcendent (as theism would have it), nor immanent-transcendent (as pantheism would have it), but entirely immanent, entirely situated in this world.

It would be wrong to assert that Feuerbach's radical claims are not also contradicted by other, conventional, claims in the *Provisional Theses*. There is, for instance, his statement that "[c]onsciousness is alone the *actual* being [and t]he *real* unity of spirit and nature is simply consciousness" (*Theses*, 162). This seems to undermine Feuerbach's critique of the idea of the primacy of consciousness. However, Feuerbach again and again emphasizes that being, not being conscious, is absolutely primary and

⁴²⁶ An incisive recent critique of the metaphysical and conservative character of the Heideggerian philosophy of being is contained in Timothy Brennan's *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2007).

must be acknowledged as a *causa sui*. This primacy, Feuerbach takes care to stress, is due to the fact that being simply *is*—it is not derived from anything—whereas thinking is derived from something, namely being: “Being is given only through being. Being has its ground in itself, because only being is sense, reason, necessity, truth, in short, everything in everything. Being *is*, because not-being is not-being, i.e., nothing, *nonsense*” (167).⁴²⁷ As Feuerbach’s concept of consciousness attests, this was not to say that ideas are nonsense *but only that* ideas are dependent upon being and that denying this amounts to believing in nonsense. (As we shall see, Marx makes the same argument in *The German Ideology*.)

The argument that Hegelian philosophy has preserved the errors of theology is rehearsed time and again. Feuerbach states that philosophy has suspended the contradiction between thought and being only within the contradiction and only within thinking (*Theses*, 166) and that “[w]hoever fails to give up the Hegelian philosophy, fails to give up theology” (ibid., 167). Philosophy that says that nature is posited by the idea is only a variation of theology that says that the world is created by God. The task of the new philosophy, then, is to leave behind the “self-deceptions” of Hegelianism once and for all (rather than recreate them through ever new versions of the old idealism, such as the concept of “self-consciousness,” as Feuerbach notes in a direct reference to Bauer), to unify all previous “antithetical truths” by bringing about or even embodying “the *negation* as much of *rationalism* as of *mysticism*, as much of *pantheism* as of

⁴²⁷ The language used here may remind the contemporary reader of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, which, even though not related in any overt sense, shares the notion of consciousness as tied to material existence but was, of course, a response to Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* in its defense of the idea of the freedom of consciousness as negation of what is. See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1966) and Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996).

personalism, and as much of *atheism* as of *theism*” (ibid., 168), and lastly to make philosophy scientific by joining once again with the natural sciences and grounding the theoretical inquiry into society in human nature. Philosophy *qua* metaphysics is to be left behind, and philosophy *qua* science is to be introduced.

If the last few lines of *Provisional Theses* reveal the limitations of Feuerbach’s humanism as well as the limitations of the view of Feuerbach as a “socialist,”⁴²⁸ it is not only because he returns to his idea that the new philosophy will reveal the “truth of Christianity” (i.e. that Man is God) but because the second to last paragraph is a fairly traditional Hegelian ode to the state as the ultimate mode of reconciliation in civil society. It becomes evident here that Feuerbach has no notion of class conflict as he posits the head of state as the representative of all classes: “In the state the essential qualities or activities of the human being are realized in particular classes [Stände], but brought back to an identity in the person of the head of state. The head of state has to represent all classes without distinction. Before the head of state they are all equally necessary and equally justified. The head of state is the representative of the universal human being” (*Theses*, 171). The radicalism of Feuerbach’s materialism, then, was liberal in many of its aspects and did not permit a concretization of the social and historical reality of modern life. In the quoted passage, Feuerbach effectively idealizes the state by portraying its actual function in the reproduction of inequality as merely arbitrary rather than as conditioned by a deeper structure. Similarly, Feuerbach’s concept

⁴²⁸ Auguste Cornu (*The Origins of Marxian Thought*, American Lectures in Philosophy [Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1957]) had grouped Feuerbach and Hess under the category of “social radicalism” and Bauer and Strauß under “liberal radicalism.” But while Cornu argues that “[t]he importance of Feuerbach was that for the first time in Germany he gave a solution (an ideological one, it is true) of the fundamental problem of the integration of man into his natural and social milieu, and hereby made a preliminary transition from Hegelianism to socialism” (68), he also closes his discussion of Feuerbach with the remark that “his sentimental and contemplative philosophy ended in a vague ethics, a shapeless religion of universal happiness and love” (69).

of being remains problematic for revolutionary theory because it rests on the notion of suffering as its most essential ingredient. In fact, Feuerbach sometimes appears to suggest that suffering is not only inevitable but beautiful and desirable: Thus, he says that while it is true that “the belief in another world makes every pain an illusion, an untruth” (ibid., 160), pain is also an essential quality of all life:

Where there is no limitation, no time and no need, there is also no quality, no energy, no spirit, no fire and no love. Only the needy entity is a necessary entity. Existence without need [‘bedürfnislose’ Existenz] is unnecessary existence. What is generally free of needs also has no need of existence. . . . An entity without need is an entity with no basis. Only what can suffer deserves to exist. Only an entity rich in pain is a divine entity. An essence without suffering is an essence without an essence. An entity devoid of sensibility, devoid of matter (Ibid., 163)

The examination of Bauer’s and Feuerbach’s radicalism demonstrates that Marx’s critique of philosophy took shape against the background of a larger movement that aimed at making theory more practical by interpreting Hegel in a decidedly this-worldly manner and making critique accountable for progress in the present. Their arguments were still couched in ontological, i.e. metaphysical, terms and pivoted on an abstract concept of consciousness. Their understanding of lived reality was not informed by a deep sense of class, labor, and material determination, which is what Marx was able to contribute to the debate. Ultimately, Feuerbach and Bauer were restrained by their own faith in philosophical negation. They believed that philosophy held the key to historical transformation because they did not grasp theoretical work as a particular form of practice in class society. If they had understood the specificity of purely mental labor as a limited and alienated, they would have recognized its *real* opposition to material activity (production) and hence its real detachment from the revolutionary forces of history.

CHAPTER 4

From Germany to Belgium and Back: Marx's Life and Work Before the "Break"

The aim of this chapter is to establish even more specifically the context within which Marx and Engels's contribution to the end-of-philosophy debate, *The German Ideology*, emerged. First, I will discuss the place of the work in the trajectory of Marx's thought and life. The years leading up to 1845, when Marx and Engels began working on *The German Ideology*, will be the focal point of this chapter. I will identify the personal and political stakes involved in their debates with the Young Hegelians. Further, this chapter will place the text in relation to some of Marx's preceding works, especially *The Holy Family*, which is in many ways very much like *The German Ideology* but still firmly belongs to what is generally considered Marx's early period. This discussion will challenge the theory of a clean break in Marx's work by drawing connections between what may be termed Marx's labor theory of ideology and his critique of Hegel and post-Hegelian critique, i.e. between his mature materialist ideas and his earlier struggles with and against philosophical metaphysics. Finally, my discussion will turn to Marx and Engels's concrete political and theoretical intentions. This should help us understand the distinct nature of the Marxian ideology critique. Rhetorically charged and concerned with one specific problem (mental labor), *The German Ideology* is fundamentally important for Marxian scholarship and theory precisely because it presents a critique that does not appear in this form in any of Marx's other works. The following chapters will concern

themselves with the *theoretical* content of that critique and explore its meaning and potential.

Life in Exile

Marx was twenty seven years old when he and Engels began working on the manuscripts that were later compiled into *The German Ideology*. These writings originated in the midst of the most tumultuous years of Marx's life. Leaving Germany in 1843 and again in 1849, Marx and his family were constantly on the move: first to Paris, then to Brussels, then back to Paris and Cologne, and finally *via* Paris to London. He went from being a philosophy student preparing himself for a university career to being a journalist, free-lance writer, activist, and important figure in the Communist movement. In the course of these early years, Marx developed his theoretical and political views. Between the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 and *The Class Struggles in France* (1848-59), Marx worked out the foundations of his materialist approach to history.

While in Brussels, Marx continued to engage critically with the views of other socialists and anarchists. He began to formulate a theory of the revolutionary proletariat that was anti-philosophical but not anti-theoretical. He rejected utopianism as well as pragmatism. He began to see, and later wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*, that the followers of Charles Fourier (1773-1837) in France and those of Robert Owen (1771-1851) in England were, despite their progressive aims, reactionary in their attempt to build experimental communities ("castles in the air") and their opposition to working class action.⁴²⁹ For the same reasons, Marx rejected the icarianism of Etienne Cabet. However, he also did not like the populism of Wilhelm Weitling or Hermann Kriege, to

⁴²⁹ Tucker, *Marx Engels Reader*, 499.

whose proselytizing and emotionalist approach he was profoundly averse. Further, Marx believed that the Left Hegelian “True Socialists” in Germany were as conservative as the reformist French socialists (whom he criticizes extensively in *The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon* [1847]). In other debates, he persistently stressed the importance of a scientific understanding of society for the struggle against bourgeois rule, and he did not trust the anti-intellectualism of some of his friends and rivals. But locating scientific materialism on the side of revolutionary practice rather than on the side of philosophy, Marx dispensed with the kind of abstract thinking that the Young Hegelians were engaged in, which was often in direct opposition to the workers’ interests.

In fact, it is obvious from Marx’s writings from that time period that he viewed the critique of all forms of idealism as a most urgent matter. Marx’s personal investment in a verbal boxing match with all humanist and other ontological, i.e. metaphysical, approaches to historical transformation is understandable in light of his own past connections with the Young Hegelians, and in particular with Bauer. More specifically, Marx felt that he had to separate himself from the anti-practical orientation of German philosophy. Other reasons why Marx devoted so much time and energy refuting the views of competing radical thinkers in Germany had to do with the fact that the latter’s critique of communism was very influential among intellectuals there, and Marx and Engels viewed its effects on the conception of a science of history as destructive or at least counter-productive. Finally, they were motivated by what was arguably a need to defend themselves, both against the charge that they were unthinking followers of Feuerbach, which they had in fact ceased to be in the course of their stay in Paris, and

against the charge that communism – their new view – was nothing more than another romanticism, i.e. an aesthetic appeal to a universal human nature, a quasi-religious projection of a *telos*, or a pathetic and unrealistic glorification of the “better” attributes of humanity.

Thus prompted to issue a response, Marx and Engels produced a set of texts that are now regarded as the “transitional” works because they mark their break with Hegelian and Left Hegelian thought. (It is important to keep in mind, however, that their denunciation of the philosophical approach extended beyond the Young Hegelians to explicitly socialist thinkers, including Proudhon, whom Marx accused in *The Poverty of Philosophy* of (mis)using Hegelian terminology.⁴³⁰) This break with philosophy has been emphasized in traditional Marxism and deemphasized in what has been referred to in the German tradition “critical Marxism.” The position advocated here is that while it is crucial to retain a clear sense of the pivotal significance of Marx’s mature writings, most notably, of course, *Capital*, there is no need to posit a strict dividing line between Marx and the *early* Marx (which generally means between the “real” Marx and the “not-quite-yet” Marx). The assertion that Marx had to divest himself of his philosophical past in order to proceed to his science of political economy is certainly a meaningful retrospective assessment, but it can encourage selective readings that pry apart the pre-*Capital* texts exclusively in terms of Marx’s later writings.⁴³¹ One of the repercussions of

⁴³⁰ Althusser has argued that in addition to the “Theses” and *The German Ideology*, *The Poverty of Philosophy* must be included in the list of the “works of the break.” I would also include *The Holy Family*, which is not concerned with political economy but puts forth a fairly systematic critique of Young Hegelian idealism that anticipates many of the points developed in *The German Ideology*.

⁴³¹ There are some who have argued that *The German Ideology* is essentially about method and that methodology is inherently metaphysical and therefore incompatible with Marx’s economic science. This notion is objectionable for various reasons, the least of which is the fact that Marx himself announced much later, in 1868, in a letter to Dietzgen, that he wanted to write a statement of method. More importantly, methodology is not metaphysical but foundational insofar as it is a self-conscious study of the premises that underlie modes of inquiry.

this tendency is the very suppression of “III. Saint Max” in most of the available English editions of *The German Ideology*.⁴³² This assumption of unequivocal advance makes it difficult to examine ideas specific to the early or middle periods *on their own terms*.

The notion of a “break” is based on the idea that Marx’s thought can be divided into two distinct and internally coherent parts. This is problematic because the rupture must appear like a miraculous event rather than something perfectly normal. Moreover, it is surely wrong to assume not only that Marx’s work after 1845 was completely different from Marx’s work before 1845 but also that there are no differences *within* the pre-break and the post-break periods. Unless a writer’s *oeuvre* as *a whole* is seen as permeated with advances and regressions, sudden insights and moments of forgetting, continuities and discontinuities, it is difficult to assess the value of particular texts or arguments *apart from* that person’s ideas, which are believed to have “grown” in the way a caterpillar transforms itself seemingly overnight into a butterfly. Specifically, the possibility that Marx’s early and transitional work might contain uniquely useful avenues of inquiry, independent from the later work, is rejected outright by those who advocate the separation of two essential periods in Marx’s thinking. Moreover, the notion of a sudden transition from one stage to another portrays the shift as the only interruption in an otherwise simple linear development.⁴³³ This progress narrative, applied to a thinker’s

⁴³² It is no coincidence that those who locate *The German Ideology* on the side of Marx’s mature work do not pay any attention to the critique of Stirner, and those who comment on the Stirner essay tend to banish *The German Ideology* as a whole to the other side of the break. The idea that the discussion of Stirner might constitute an irreducibly particular episode in Marx’s development that cannot be contained in the “language of the break” between philosophy and political economy has not been explored in the literature yet. It is, however, the approach taken here.

⁴³³ One way in which this understanding has been expressed in the literature is Auguste Cornu’s claim that the critique of German philosophy in *The German Ideology* belonged to a previous period in Marx’s development while the critique of socialist utopianism in the same work was already part of a new period (*Die Herausbildung des Historischen Materialismus in Marx’ ‘Thesen über Feuerbach’, Engels’ ‘Die Lage der Arbeitenden Klasse in England’ und in ‘Die deutsche Ideologie’ von Marx und Engels*, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin 104 [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1967], 24).

biography, thwarts any attempt to understand the connections between intellectual change and the general personal and political context. (After all, Marx's work was directly affected by the vagaries of German and European history, not only by the intellectual debates of his day.) For example, Marx's interest in the Young Hegelian debate will appear as a sign of immaturity when his subsequent lack of interest in this debate should be read as a result of the fact that the debate itself had run its course. Further still, individual ideas can easily be dismissed as "immature" simply because they were present in the thinker's early works but absent in the later works. This can cause misinterpretations of those very later works. The critique of idealism, for example, can be written off as merely "transitional" if its tacit persistence in Marx's mature critique of bourgeois categories is not acknowledged.

Nonetheless, if we resist taking a formal exaggeration literally, the concept of the "break" can be useful. Insofar as *The German Ideology* does indeed mark a shift in Marx's thinking, a shift that was prompted by Marx's turn away from the philosophy of history and toward the scientific study of material practice⁴³⁴, it is critical to avoid the notion that the shift came about out of the blue. First, if the theories developed in *The German Ideology* are in many ways commensurable with Marx's mature critique of the capitalist mode of production, this is because his reception of Stirner and reevaluation of Feuerbach was already shaped by his early studies of economics at that time. Marx's excerpts from the years 1844/45 reveal that he had been reading a wide variety of theoretical texts on political economy.⁴³⁵ In fact, he had signed a contract with the

⁴³⁴ See, for example, Benedetto Croce's discussion of Labriola's claim that historical materialism "properly speaking . . . is not a philosophy of history" (*Historical Materialism*, 11) and that we should "gladly keep to the name *realistic view of history*, which denotes the opposition to all teleology and metaphysics within the sphere of history" (ibid. 26).

⁴³⁵ See MEGA © (Berlin: Dietz Verlag) IV/3 and IV 4.

Darmstadt publisher Karl Leske the day before he left for Brussels. Marx planned to write a *Critique of Economics and Politics*, in preparation for which he traveled to England in the summer of 1845. Returning from England, however, he changed his mind and decided that he first wanted to work on some smaller, more immediately relevant, pieces. Marx explained this decision to Leske by telling him that he had to negate the prevailing approach to social conflict and change before he could move on to defend a new approach. Thus, he wrote: “It seemed to me very important that a work polemicising against German philosophy and current German socialism should precede my positive construction. This is necessary to prepare the public for the point of view of my *Economics* which is diametrically opposed to the previous German intellectual approach.”⁴³⁶

As is well known, *The German Ideology* was a collaborative effort. Marx’s friend Friedrich Engels turned 25 in November of 1845. Only a year earlier, they had met in Paris, and Engels was able to contribute his in-depth knowledge of the situation of the English working class to their partnership, which was to last for 40 years until Marx’s death. After an initial uneventful meeting in Cologne, Marx was greatly impressed by Engels’s essay “Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy” (1844), written in Manchester and sent to the *Rheinische Zeitung*. Their work in Brussels was a continuation of their joint writings on the Bauer brothers (*The Holy Family*). Engels, too, had renounced the liberalism of the Young Hegelians, which meant for him a cutting of ties with the Free, with whom he had associated until he met Moses Hess in 1844. There is evidence that Engels did not initially have as negative an impression of Stirner’s *The Ego and Its Own* as Marx did, but their views on the Young Hegelians seem to have

⁴³⁶ Quoted in David McLellan, *Karl Marx: A Biography* (London: Papermac, 1995), 133-134.

converged in the course of their collaboration. Since discrete authorship cannot be attributed, Engels must, for all intents and purposes, be considered a co-author of the texts belonging to *The German Ideology*.

This point is important because the assumption of a Marx-Engels unity has been challenged for quite a while. The challenge begins with the argument that the two thinkers' contributions to the joint works should be separated. The premise of this argument is that Marx and Engels were two radically different thinkers and that Engels was responsible for the supposedly crude interpretation of Marx after his death.⁴³⁷ I claim, however, that, while it can be argued that Engels's later work on the dialectics of nature marks a certain departure from Marx's ideas, these differences cannot be considered relevant in the context of *The German Ideology*. Therefore, it would be incorrect to attribute certain passages (conveniently those that are at odds with the currently dominant interpretations of Marx's ideas) in *The German Ideology* to Engels and relieve oneself in this manner of the burden of explaining them.⁴³⁸ If critics argue that some of the ideas in this text are too mechanistic, then this problem cannot be resolved by declaring those parts of the text to be "uncharacteristic" of Marx and simply crediting them to Engels. This is not credible because Marx and Engels surely would not have worked together so closely if they had had fundamental disagreements on central points. In fact, it is

⁴³⁷ As pointed out, the handwriting in *The German Ideology* is largely Engels's, but this clearly does not mean that Engels composed the actual text, though this has been argued by at least one scholar, but rather only that Engels took on that task of copying their notes out since his script was more legible. It cannot be maintained that Marx dictated the text to Engels because this would surely misrepresent the nature of the collaboration based on the assumption that Engels was an inferior intellect, a notion apparently in line with Engels's own modest retrospective assessment but clearly at odds with Marx's high opinion of him. The general denigration of Engels's contribution to Marxism is reflected in the fact, as Christopher J. Arthur says in his introduction to *Engels Today* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), "it is always Marx who is the 'good guy' and Engels the villain" (xii).

⁴³⁸ There is, to my knowledge, only one passage in "I. Feuerbach" that can be traced directly to Engels. See chapter 5.

reasonable to assume that the Brussels years allowed the two to create a common intellectual and political space.

The events in Europe played a critical role in the course of Marx and Engels's work at this point. In France, probably due to pressure by the Prussian government, Louis Philippe closed down the socialist paper *Vorwärts!*, and Guizot's regime forced the emigration of Marx, Heine, and Ruge. In February of 1845, Marx left for Brussels, where he was joined by his wife and family as well as by Engels and other friends, including Hess and Georg Jung. Marx was able to stay in Belgium only after convincing the authorities that he would abstain from all political activities and renouncing his Prussian citizenship. Both Hess and Engels lived next door to Marx. Also among his circle of friends was Joseph Weydemeyer, who, together with Marx, wrote the article "Bruno Bauer und sein Apologet" published in the *Westphälisches Dampfboot*.⁴³⁹ But these three years were not only a time of theoretical exchange, Marx was also involved in practical politics. He started a Communist "Correspondence Committee" to facilitate conversations among European socialists. The goal was to set up different chapters in all major European cities. Communist leaders were invited to the meetings, where matters of strategy and principle were debated. McLellan calls this forum "the embryo of all the subsequent Communist Internationals."⁴⁴⁰ One visible result of these activities was the founding of the "Communist League" in 1847 in London.⁴⁴¹ The set of statutes drawn up

⁴³⁹ This article will be included in the MEGA ② (Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Moses Heß, *Die deutsche Ideologie. Manuskripte und Drucke* [November 1845 bis Juni 1846], I: 5). It has already been incorporated into a prepublication of parts of this volume; see Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Joseph Weydemeyer, *Die deutsche Ideologie. Artikel, Druckvorlagen, Entwürfe, Reinschriftenfragmente und Notizen zu I. Feuerbach und II. Sankt Bruno*, ed. Inge Taubert, Hans Pelger, et al., Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch 2003 (Berlin: Akademie, 2004), 2 volumes.

⁴⁴⁰ McLellan, *Karl Marx*, 139.

⁴⁴¹ The "Communist League" (*Bund der Kommunisten*) continued the work of the "German Worker's Educational Union" (*Arbeiterbildungsverein*). Both can be viewed as successors of the "League of the Just" in Paris (*Bund der Gerechten*), which was in turn derived from the "League of Outlaws" (*Bund der Geächteten*).

by Marx for the Communist League has become known as the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

In the aftermath of the revolutionary activities in Paris in March, 1848, the Belgian government moved to deport a number of socialists, including Marx. Having been granted readmission into France, Marx went to Paris and, after hearing of the revolution in Berlin, left for Germany in April of 1848, where he moved to Cologne and established the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* with Marx and Engels as main contributors. Just like its predecessor, the *Rheinische Zeitung*, which Marx had edited between 1842 and 1843, this paper took a moderate stance towards the revolutionary activities in Germany. Marx's approach was based on his assessment of the political situation. McLellan describes the tenor of the paper as follows:

The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* did not preach a socialist republic nor exclusively a workers' one. The programme was universal [male] suffrage, direct elections, the abolition of all feudal dues and charges, the establishment of a state banking system, and the admission of state responsibility for unemployment. Capitalism (even state capitalism), private property and class antagonism would still exist and, indeed, expand. The essence of the programme was the emancipation of the bourgeoisie with some concessions to workers and peasants. This position implied a certain standing apart from the efforts of workers' organisations for self-improvement, and lay behind Marx's criticism of Gottschalk's policies on Cologne. . . . This policy was so carefully carried out in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* that, with one exception and notwithstanding the declaration of Engels above, neither Marx nor Engels published anything during 1848 that dealt with the situation or interests of the working class as such.⁴⁴²

This perspective was partially a result of Marx's understanding of the importance of political tactics, but the criticisms from other leaders of the workers' movements and radical groups mounted, especially after Marx unilaterally dissolved the "Communist League" out of a sense of its irrelevance in a time of regained freedom of speech and press. It seems, however, that Marx changed his position and ended up leaving the

⁴⁴² McLellan, *Karl Marx*, 187.

“Democratic Association,” with which he had worked while in Cologne. Trying to save the paper from bankruptcy and to renew his contacts with other communists, Marx returned from a brief trip only to find himself expelled from Prussia. The paper was shut down, and, in 1849, Marx was forced to leave first Germany and then Paris. Finally, he moved to London, where he lived until he died. Because of England’s relative isolation from the activities on the mainland, Marx never again became involved politically to the extent that he had been in the years during, prior to, and immediately after, his Brussels period.

The history of Marx’s post-Brussels journalistic activities is worth revisiting here because it provides a sense of the precise origin of the texts that comprise *The German Ideology* as well as their immediate meaning from Marx’s perspective beyond the borders of Germany (specifically in relation to Marx’s understanding of Germany economic and political backwardness). In contrast to Marx’s later years which he is known to have spent mostly in the London library, the years between 1843/44 and 1849 were characterized by intense discourse with other radicals, unrest, and heated argumentation over recent publications. During this time in Marx’s life, there was much general excitement and agitation among his circle of friends and acquaintances. A notion of this general milieu throws light on the passionate nature of Marx and Engels’s engagement with Max Stirner in *The German Ideology*. Hence, both volumes of this work, as well as similarly motivated texts from that time period, like *The Holy Family*, can only be understood with an adequate appreciation of their *immediate* quality.

The History of a Manuscript

Beyond the cultural background, we must consider the original form and intended audience of Marx and Engels's last extensive critique of the Young Hegelians. The history of Marx and Engels's written discourse from 1845/46 is particularly fascinating because we can glean from it the peculiarly conversational tone and narrowly focused content of *The German Ideology*. To start, in order to understand what is so fascinating about the history of the manuscript, it is important to recall that since David Riazanov's "discovery" of the manuscript⁴⁴³, it has been assumed that the work was intended as a two-volume book on the principles of historical materialism. The much more recent discovery that this should *not* have been the case forces us to reevaluate our understanding of the text as such.

According to the most recent research⁴⁴⁴, it was not until the summer of 1846, after most of the manuscript had already been finished, that Marx and Engels sought a publisher for their book. Prior to that, the essays were intended to be part of a quarterly journal that Marx planned to publish in Germany. After the failures of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* and the abortive attempts to turn the *Vorwärts!* into a monthly, Marx may have wanted to create a successor periodical. Following the model of the

⁴⁴³ For a personal account of how Riazanov wrested the manuscript from Eduard Bernstein's hands, see David Rjasanoff, "Neueste Mitteilungen über den literarischen Nachlaß von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels," in Carl Grünberg (ed.), *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung* 11 (Leipzig: Verlag von C. L. Hirschfeld, 1925), 385-400. The report concluded, among other things, the "immense significance of the manuscript for the biography of Marx and Engels, for the history of ideology, for the history of the German social, political, and economic thought of the nineteenth century, for the nineteenth-century history of ideas in general" (391; translation mine). Gustav Mayer corrects some of Rjasanoff's assertions in "Die 'Entdeckung' des Manuskripts der 'Deutschen Ideologie'" (ibid. 12: 184-187).

⁴⁴⁴ See the detailed account of this research in Galina Golowina, "Das Projekt der Vierteljahrsschrift von 1845/1846: Zu den ursprünglichen Publikationsplänen der Manuskripte der 'Deutschen Ideologie'," in *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch* 3 (1980): 260-274. Golowina also notes that Riazanov's representation of his contribution to the recovery of the work is not entirely faithful and that Riazanov falsely dismissed the work not only of Bernstein but also of Mehring and Meyer (9 fn 9).

Wigandsche Vierteljahrschrift, the quarterly was supposed to contain articles by a number of writers, including Moses Hess, Weydemeyer, Georg Weerth, Roland Daniels, Karl Ludwig Bernays, Weitling, and others. Marx was to be the editor and Engels and Hess his collaborators. These findings significantly alter our understanding of *The German Ideology* and clarify many of the perceived oddities about it, such as its combative language, disproportionate length, and heterogeneous character. Several things are relevant in this regard. First, the fact that the manuscript was meant to be published in a journal accounts for its polemical tone.⁴⁴⁵ Second, the length of the work can be explained by the fact that Marx and Engels needed to fill at least 20 sheets in order to avoid censorship.⁴⁴⁶ Third, it becomes clear that the manuscript was never a cohesive exposition but rather an uneven set of notes organized around a central review essay of Max Stirner's book *The Ego and Its Own*. Moreover, certain contradictions can be resolved, such as the fact that Moses Hess was involved in the publication of a work that subjected him to a sharp critique⁴⁴⁷: Since he was not a co-author of the text, as was

⁴⁴⁵ One of the first things that commentators like to note when speaking of *The German Ideology* is that it is a *tour de force*. However, there have been differences in how this fact is evaluated. Until recently, the polemical form of the manuscript has been either downplayed (by orthodox interpreters) or used to diminish the content of the work (by Western and critical Marxists). The difference is apparent, for instance, in the following two comments: While West German Fritz Raddatz explains in his Marx biography that *The German Ideology* is “[e]in Buch von stupender Intrasigenz” (*Karl Marx: Der Mensch und seine Lehre* [München: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, 1977], 79), East German Heinrich Gemkow explains in his Marx biography that the work was an “echten wissenschaftlichen Meinungsstreit . . .” (*Karl Marx: Eine Biographie* [Berlin: Dietz, 1967], 90).

⁴⁴⁶ The policies and procedures governing censorship in Germany differed from one state to another. However, typically, longer works were not subjected to the same kind of scrutiny as were shorter works, such as pamphlets and articles.

⁴⁴⁷ Moses Hess was criticized by Marx and Engels not only in the second volume of *The German Ideology* but also in *The Communist Manifesto*. Lukács defended this attack on Hess in his “Moses Hess und die Probleme der idealistischen Dialektik.” In this essay, Lukács maintained that “Sie [Marxens Kritik] tat ihnen [den wahren Sozialisten] nur insofern unrecht, als sie die Wurzellosigkeit . . . , seine ideologische Wesensart noch unterschätzte: nicht in Betracht zog, daß H.’s Theories in dieser Hinsicht derart utopisch, seine Kritik der Bourgeoisie derart nur eine Übernahme englischer und französischer Resultate in die Begriffssprache einer rein idealistischen Dialektik war, daß sie bei der ersten Berührung mit der revolutionären Wirklichkeit einfach zerschmelzen, als Theorie spurlos zunichte werden konnte” (in Grünberg (ed.), *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, 105-155).

previously hypothesized, but merely engaged in the plans to put out the *journal*, the authors of the articles were free to criticize Hess the writer.

The plan for the journal was laid out in the spring of 1845, and Marx and Engels began writing their articles in the fall. In order to keep the project underway, Marx and Engels asked their friends in late 1845 and early 1846 to submit their work to them for inclusion in the journal. It appears that by March of 1846, the complete set of manuscripts was compiled and in Marx's hands in Brussels. In April, Weydemeyer presented a portion of the material (the portion intended for the first installment) to the publishers Julius Meyer and Rudolph Rempel in Westphalia who had agreed to take on at least the first of the two projected volumes and who had already given Hess, who had led the initial negotiations with Meyer and Rempel, an advance for the work. They received the manuscript for the second volume in June. Some time between May and July, however, it became clear to Marx and Engels that the men from Westphalia had dropped the project, probably due to its political content. The manuscripts were sent back to Cologne, where another attempt to publish them was undertaken, but at that point, the prospects of finding a publisher for the quarterly were bleak. It was at that time that plans were made to publish Marx and Engels's contributions separately in the form of a book. By October of that year, or in early 1847 at the latest, the manuscripts were back in Brussels.

As it turns out, the bulk of *The German Ideology* never appeared in print during Marx's and Engels's lifetimes. It was not until 1932 that the whole text came out for the first time as Volume 5 of the *Marx/Engels Gesamtausgabe*. This edition was published by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central committee of the C.P.S.U. The first

English translation of the entire work was issued in 1964. Only two sections of the manuscript were published before the turn of the century. One of those was a piece on Karl Grün written for Volume II; it came out in *Das Westphälische Dampfboot*, 1847. Subsequently, some parts of the text ended up in Marx's estate and some in Engels's *Nachlass*. The latter was managed by Eduard Bernstein who, in 1903, worked on a publication of "Saint Max" but never saw it through and only published a small section of the essay. In 1921, another leader of the German Social-Democratic Party, Gustav Mayer, released "The Leipzig Council" and "II. Saint Bruno." "I. Feuerbach" was originally published in Russian in 1924, then in German in 1926, and the same year in English (translated from Russian). The German original was published in the *Marx-Engels-Archiv*, published by the *Institut für Sozialforschung* in Frankfurt. It was at this time that the various fragments which Marx and Engels had decided, in 1846, to integrate into "I. Feuerbach," were fused on the basis of handwritten notes by Marx and Engels and certain determinations about the stages of the writing process (with individual fragments being classified as drafts, final drafts, or printer's copies).

The *Internationale Marx-Engels Stiftung* and the editors of the MEGA ② have since endorsed the interpretation, advanced, for instance, by Inge Taubert, that the construction of "I. Feuerbach" as a smooth entity was accomplished for political reasons: namely, to produce evidence of a coherent elaboration of the method of historical materialism in Marx's works.⁴⁴⁸ Especially since the collapse of Soviet communism, IMES has rejected such maneuvers and committed to providing a new presentation of the text, characterized by as little editorial interference as possible.⁴⁴⁹ Accordingly, in the

⁴⁴⁸ See Marx, Engels, and Weydemeyer, *Die deutsche Ideologie*. 3. For more on this issue, see Chapter 5, e.g. fn 2.

⁴⁴⁹ *The German Ideology* is planned to go into print in 2009/2010. For a declaration of editorial principles, see "The Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA) Project," Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der

introduction to the prepublication of the text material on Feuerbach and Bauer, the editors criticize the group around Riazanov for making it seem as if Marx and Engels had left us a fully constituted “introduction” to their “system.” They take particular issue with the way the different parts of “I. Feuerbach” were patched together, suggesting, through the use of inferred and invented subheadings as well as new pagination, a smooth unity. Thus, they maintain, “With these massive interventions, the editors construct a Feuerbach chapter into the state of the manuscript; that is, they finish the work of Marx and Engels without sufficient evidence to support this action.”⁴⁵⁰ The *Marx-Engels Werke* adopted the same structure. Since then, there have been five other attempts at a systematic integration of the seven fragments belonging to “I. Feuerbach.”

Nonetheless, Riazanov’s work was invaluable, especially given the terrible condition of the manuscript, the low quality of the photocopied pages, and the missing sheets, some of which were found later. Unfortunately, Riazanov was never able to see the publication of I/5 of the MEGA (1) through to its completion. He was arrested in 1931 (and executed in 1938)⁴⁵¹, and Vladimir Adoratskij became the editor of the 1932 edition, which has since become the standard reference for scholars working in German. In his introduction, Adoratskij, shockingly but not surprisingly, does not mention Riazanov’s role and considerable achievements in preparing the manuscript for publication. Thirty years later, in 1962, Siegfried Bahne published three previously lost sheets of the manuscript.⁴⁵² This prompted a republication of “I. Feuerbach” in four

Wissenschaften, 2 July 2008, < <http://www.bbaw.de/bbaw/Forschung/Forschungsprojekte/mega/en> > (20 July 2009).

⁴⁵⁰ Marx, Engels, and Weydemeyer, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, 12; translation mine.

⁴⁵¹ Due to conflict with the party, Riazanov (1870-1938), the founder and director of the Marx-Engels-Institute, was sent to a labor camp, later released, and shortly thereafter killed.

⁴⁵² Siegfried Bahne, “‘Die deutsche Ideologie’ von Marx und Engels: Einige Textergänzungen” *International Review of social history*, vol. VII, part 1 (1962): 94.

different presentations, one of which is that of the *Collected Works* (used in this dissertation), a translation, which relies on the version of the Russian revision of 1965/66. One other noteworthy edition is that published by Wataru Hiromatsu in 1974. Its specific aim was also to reproduce the handwritten documents as authentically as possible; however, the editors of the MEGA ② have objected to a handful of decisions made in the arrangement of the text. The MEGA ② intends to give the different sections of the manuscript in strictly chronological order and without any added subheadings. The idea is to present the fragments exactly as they were passed down to us: “This means that a logical-systematic constitution of the texts belonging to “I. Feuerbach” is not compatible with the editorial principles laid down for the MEGA ②.”⁴⁵³

The knotty history of the manuscript and its published editions demonstrates that much about the text and its creation has remained obscure until fairly recently. In particular, it is apparent that *The German Ideology* was never conceived as a comprehensive treatment of a particular theoretical or methodological issue and therefore cannot be compared with *Capital*. The former really *is* written in the “mode of discovery” or “mode of research,” rather than the “mode of presentation,” and has all the attributes of a direct-response essay, i.e. of a running commentary on the source being interpreted and criticized. The few polished passages in “I. Feuerbach” that are more systematic and abstract should probably be viewed as a separate, albeit very disjointed, manuscript⁴⁵⁴,

⁴⁵³ Marx, Engels, and Weydemeyer, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, 20.

⁴⁵⁴ While there is only one draft for the essays on Bauer and Stirner, the Feuerbach “chapter” consists of several drafts. The so-called “main manuscript” of the introduction has been paginated by Marx (1-72) and contains three previous drafts. The first 29 pages are now considered the original nucleus of the work; they were part of an article in response to Bauer’s “Characteristic Ludwig Feuerbach.” (There is evidence to suggest that Joseph Weydemeyer’s article “Bruno Bauer and his Apologist,” which was written in collaboration with Marx, originated in connection with “II. Saint Max.”) Pages 30-35 were transferred into the introduction by Marx and Engels from the first part and pages 36-72 from the second part of the critique of “Saint Max.” Further, there are two versions of the beginning of the chapter. In the available editions, these clean copies have been placed before the main manuscript, but in the MEGA (2) they will be presented afterwards. Inge Taubert and Hans Pelger make a point to say that this strategy is to “prevent

just as “II” and “III” should be treated as distinct entities. The essays that are included in Volume 2 are similarly specific and journalistic in nature. However, the relation between the different parts of *The German Ideology* can only give is a vague idea of the actual state of the manuscript.

Knowing about the physical condition of the manuscript enables us to get an even more precise sense of Marx and Engels’s writing process. First, it should be noted that the manuscript did not to our knowledge originally bear a title; rather, the words *The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets* were taken later from a comment Marx made in 1847 in reference to a part of the second volume that he extracted and published individually. However, even there, Marx did not seem to think of it as a title.⁴⁵⁵ Second, the unfinished state of the

from granting it [the main manuscript] a maturity which it does not have” (Marx, Engels, and Weydemeyer, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, 21.) Finally, there are two fragments, one of which has been attributed with some certainty to Engels: the often-quoted passage that includes the *camera obscura* reference (ibid., 20). To capture the state of “I. Feuerbach,” then, it suffices to note that the text consists of three main layers and seven distinct manuscripts.

Taubert et al. represent the structure of part I as follows: The first section (I/5-3 in MEGA 2) consists of three independent parts, is paginated 1-72 (with 3-7 and 36-39 missing). The first of those parts (α) originated with a draft of an article against Bauer’s “Charakteristik Ludwig Feuerbachs” and is divided into “Feuerbach,” “History,” and “Bauer.” There are three lengthy additions written in the margins. Parts β and γ were produced later while Marx and Engels wrote “Saint Max.” The former is a coherent whole, while the latter becomes sketchy toward the end and breaks off. These three sections, while very different, are paginated as one whole. There is also a set of notes (δ), made by Marx for revision purposes; they do not carry page numbers. The second main part (I/5-4) has the title “Feuerbach” and represents two successive versions of a draft of the part on Feuerbach in the critique of Bauer (3 α). Then there is the polished version of “I. Feuerbach.” It consists of three parts (I/5-5 through 7), the first two of which are variants of the same text. 5 seems to have been intended for integration into 6, but it is unclear how. 6 consists of an introduction and the section titled “1. Die Ideologie überhaupt, speciell die deutsche Philosophie.” 7 is a clean copy, made by Engels, of the introduction in 6. The last two parts (I/5-8 and 9) were apparently written after 6 and 7, but it is not clear in what order. Engels’s pagination of the sheets (3 and 5) indicates that 9 follows 8 (ibid., 52)

⁴⁵⁵ Marx’s description of the book project appears in his “A Declaration against Karl Grün,” *MECW* 6, 72. Marx states in this letter:

I must confide . . . that I have experienced so little urge to acquaint “the German world” with the results of my studies of Herr Grün’s *Soziale Bewegung in Frankreich und Belgien* that I have permitted a fairly comprehensive review of Grün’s book, prepared a year ago, peacefully to sleep the sleep of the just in manuscript form, and only now that I have been challenged by our friend in Berlin shall I send it to the *Westphälisches Dampfboot* to be printed. The review forms an appendix to the book written jointly by *Fr. Engels* and me on “*the German ideology*” (critique of modern German

work is apparent in the fact that the text is greatly marked-up and covered with notes and alterations. To appreciate this situation, the reader should picture a text that is split into two columns, with the comments, changes, and additions on the right hand side. The question of how to edit the material in the right column has been a contested one, but typically it appears in the endnotes, as is the case in the *Collected Works*.⁴⁵⁶ To make interpretation more difficult, several pages are still missing, and some pages are torn. Moreover, sections II and III of Volume 2 have never been found. Passages that were crossed out, either by the authors themselves or later on by Bernstein, have been partially restored. A few passages have been deemed corrupted beyond recovery. In other words, if the ideas developed in part I seem undeveloped, it is because they are; however, this appearance is also due to the deteriorated state of the text.

With respect to the chronology of writing process, it is clear that “II” and “III” of Volume 1 were written before “I,” a fact that strongly supports the claim that the critique of the Young Hegelians Stirner and Bauer was the framework, on the basis of which Marx and Engels articulated some fundamental ideas about the historical dialectic. Traditionally, the opposite has been assumed: namely that the critique of Bauer and Stirner was more or less derived from the doctrines laid out in “I.” Given these considerations, I maintain that it is historically wrong to treat “II” and “III” as superfluous asides or mere examples. Certainly, it can be argued that in contrast with “I,” which is a general summary of the critical points of the work, “II” and “III” are of lesser importance because of their highly particular subject matter; however, if we want to

philosophy as expounded by its representatives Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Stirner, and of *German socialism* as expounded by its various prophets). The circumstances which have hindered the printing of this manuscript and still hinder it will perhaps be set forth for the reader elsewhere as a contribution to the description of the “current state of the press in Germany. (Ibid.)

⁴⁵⁶ The MEGA ② presents the text in its two-column structure.

understand Marx and Engels's thought *as it developed*, we must go back especially to part "III," which must be viewed as the core text of the work.

With a clear sense of the chronological order of the texts, one might reasonably ask whether there is any connection between "III: Saint Max" and Marx's prior written works, as the answer might shed some more light on the significance of this essay in Marx's development. Here, it is important to remember that there has been a long-standing consensus that the set of notes known under the title of *Theses on Feuerbach*⁴⁵⁷ should be read in conjunction with *The German Ideology*. Surely, this is a valid assumption since the criticism of Feuerbach in the *Theses* can be shown to relate directly to the ideas articulated in "I. Feuerbach." In this context, it is noteworthy that Marx had already read and worked through Stirner's *The Ego* when he wrote the "Theses" in April of 1845. The question of whether Marx changed or revised some of his ideas between then and June of 1846 when the work on *The German Ideology*, begun in November of 1845, was essentially completed, cannot be answered here. However, it may be suggested that the intellectual proximity between the two texts invites the conclusion that the apparent contradiction between the famous eleventh thesis ("Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert, es kommt darauf an sie zu *verändern*" [CW 5, 9]: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it") and the main argument of *The German Ideology* (that philosophy cannot change the world) is not in fact a contradiction, resulting from a change of heart on Marx's part. Rather, it may be suggested that the phrase "the point is to change the world" does not refer to the philosophers but to the revolutionary classes. This reading would be in line

⁴⁵⁷ The 11 notes have survived under the title "*ad Feuerbach*." They were published by Engels in 1888 in the Appendix of that year's edition of Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, the foreword to which calls the sketch the "Theses on Feuerbach."

with *The German Ideology*. George Lichtheim has given voice to this interpretation, stating in a different context that “the central problem now before us is not so much to change the world (that is being done independently), but to understand it.”⁴⁵⁸ The biographical facts sustain such a hypothesis. More specifically, there is reason to assume that Marx planned to write a review of Stirner’s *The Ego* since December of 1844, immediately after the book’s unofficial publication, but could not realize this intention until he arrived in Brussels.

In many ways, the form of *The German Ideology* is an accurate representation of the kind of work Marx and Engels were doing at the time. They debated with other radicals both within and outside of the communist camp. Viewed in this manner, it becomes clear that the critique of Bauer and Stirner was located at one end of this spectrum and the critique of True Socialism and the French socialists at the other. In fact, the second volume of *The German Ideology* is closely connected stylistically and thematically with pamphlets such as the “Circular Against Kriege” (1846).⁴⁵⁹ Incidentally, this denunciation of Kriege’s “religion of love” elicited some strong responses; Hess, for example, distanced himself from Marx in the course of that same year. Further, one might view the transition from the critique of German socialism to the attack on Proudhon as a seamless one. *The Poverty of Philosophy* appeared in Brussels and Paris in 1847 and was to become Marx’s first *published* exposition of his materialist conception of history. The first volume of *The German Ideology*, however, has to be placed primarily in the context of Marx and Engels’s dispute with the Young Hegelians, that is, with texts like the article “Against Bruno Bauer,” which was written on November

⁴⁵⁸ George Lichtheim, *From Marx to Hegel* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), vii.

⁴⁵⁹ *CW* 6, 35.

20, 1845 and appeared in January of 1846 in the Brussels *Gesellschaftsspiegel*. This short piece is significant in particular because it appears to have been written as part of section “5. Saint Bruno in His ‘Triumphal Chariot’” in “II. Saint Bruno.”⁴⁶⁰

***The Holy Family* and the Critique of “Critical Criticism”**

In addition to *The Poverty of Philosophy*, other works of relevance are *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law: Introduction* (1843) and *On the Jewish Question* (also 1843). While the latter work is important because it signaled the beginning of Marx’s break with Bauer, there is one other work on Bauer that is very closely related to *The German Ideology*: Marx and Engels’s first collaborative project, *The Holy Family*. This book was written in 1844 and published in 1845 under the subtitle *Critique of Critical Criticism: Against Bruno Bauer and Co.* Reading *The Holy Family* in conjunction with *The German Ideology* brings out the process through which Marx came to formulate a secular-critical approach to history that gradually replaced humanist categories with economic analysis.

To be sure, the ideas expressed in *On the Jewish Question* are still a far cry from what is now considered distinctly Marxian theory, with basic concepts like “capitalism” and “communism” absent, and *The Holy Family* is not significantly different in that respect. However, what is present in the second text is the critique of civil life as ruled by commerce and money, and it is this critique that indicates that Marx would eventually turn toward the study of political economy, which found its first expression in the excerpts, notes, and drafts that are called the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of*

⁴⁶⁰ MECW 5, 116.

1844 or *Paris Manuscripts*. If Bauer wanted to place political emancipation before religious emancipation, Marx argued in *On the Jewish Question* that economic emancipation had to precede both. In *The Holy Family*, however, Marx was further able to draw on his social-materialist interpretation of the Hegelian notion of alienation to develop the economic notion of the mode of production. For that reason, *The Holy Family* must be seen as a direct precursor of *The German Ideology*. A discussion of *The Holy Family* will establish the Marx's "break" with philosophy did not appear like a bolt of lightening out of the clear blue sky but rather was a direct continuation, if not the logical conclusion, of (his) Young Hegelian critical philosophy.

Apart from the fact that *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology* share a number of characteristics and concerns, and an analysis of the former is therefore pertinent to our understanding of the latter, *The Holy Family* makes for an interesting study in part simply because it has rarely been examined. Marx was already critical of the Young Hegelianism of Bauer, and *On the Jewish Question*, which deals primarily with Bauer's article "The Jewish Question" (1843), attests to this. *The Holy Family*, by contrast, deals more generally with Bauer's and his disciples' recent articles in the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*. But, while *On the Jewish Question* has been a widely read and discussed text, *The Holy Family* has not⁴⁶¹ — despite the fact that its publication created quite a stir at the time. This is most likely due to the highly particular subjects discussed in the essays, which are, to a large extent, reviews of different articles by now long forgotten members of the Bauer group. The specific nature and form of the content

⁴⁶¹ The arguments of *On the Jewish Question* and the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* have been rehearsed many times. This is not the case with *The Holy Family*. For perhaps obvious reasons, the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* is also far better known than *The Holy Family*. It is significant that neither Robert Tucker's *Marx-Engels Reader*, nor the Penguin edition of *Karl Marx: Early Writings* contain a part of *The Holy Family*.

is, then, is another important similarity between *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology*. Moreover, *The Holy Family* was conceived as a pamphlet but ended up, mostly thanks to Marx, growing into a 300-page tome, much like *The German Ideology*. the detailed analyses and arguments in this work also bear resemblances, both in structure and tone, with those of *The German Ideology*. Finally, *The Holy Family* has received a similarly negative treatment as “III. Saint Max” because of its particular and polemical character.⁴⁶²

The purpose of the following discussion, then, is to show some ways in which *The Holy Family* can be considered a quintessential work of Marx’s transitional period, centrally relevant to the study of *The German Ideology*. Even though *The Holy Family* does not contain the word “ideology,” Marx’s concept of ideology permeates the text, which is one of the primary reasons why an analysis of the work must figure into any comprehensive study of *The German Ideology*. To be more precise, the critique of idealism, which had been a major impulse in Marx’s early work, takes on more defined contours in this lengthy polemic against the “critical criticism” advocated by Bauer and his fellow travelers. After Bauer’s break with politics, he and Marx had become estranged, and Marx became increasingly skeptical and outright hostile toward his theoretical outlook. “*The Holy Family*” is an ironic reference to the Bauer brothers Edgar, Egbert, and Bruno, who were editing the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, which exemplified the Young Hegelian shift towards a more elitist, anti-pragmatic/practical, individualist, and ultimate reactionary posture. In a series of essays, Marx and Engels

⁴⁶² McLellan, who has made consistently negative remarks about *The German Ideology*, captures the negative assessment of *The Holy Family* when he says that “[m]uch of Marx’s attack consisted of hair-splitting and deliberate misrepresentation which distorted their opponents’ articles to the point of absurdity. . . . There was little, indeed of permanent interest” (McLellan, *Karl Marx*, 117).

deal with various articles published in the journal and their authors⁴⁶³, including one Franz Zychlin von Zychlinski, *alias* Szeliga, to whom Marx and Engels refer repeatedly in *The German Ideology*. Discussing particular articles and simultaneously attacking the larger issues that the journal represented for them, Marx and Engels used their critique as a springboard for theoretical reflections that not only helped them redefine and refine their own materialist approach, which, however, remains Feuerbachian throughout, but also forced them to think about the specific material conditions that produce philosophical idealism. These reflections paved the way for Marx and Engels's ideology critique in *The German Ideology*.

The allegations in *The Holy Family* prefigure those in *The German Ideology*. Marx, who wrote the majority of the text, uses a tone very much like that of *The German Ideology*: caustic and exacting. Further, the target of his critique is immediately obvious when he states in the "Foreword" that "*Real humanism* has no more dangerous enemy in Germany than *spiritualism* or *speculative idealism*, which substitutes 'self-consciousness' or the '*spirit*' for the *real individual man*.'" ⁴⁶⁴ The charge that the Young Hegelians replace "real history" with "critical history" is like a red thread that holds together *The Holy Family* and continues into *The German Ideology*. Right away, Marx and Engels argue that the critics posit the historical result before the process, assuming, in Hegelian fashion, that "the son begets the father" (*CW* 4, 12), as Engels puts it. This idea and phrase reappears several times in *The German Ideology*. Further, according to Marx and

⁴⁶³ Others were Julius Faucher and Edgar Bauer as well as more obscure figures such as a certain Reichhardt and a certain Jungnitz. In his *Marx: Geschichte seines Lebens*, Franz Mehring claimed that Bauer was unable to recruit the prominent members of the Free, like Köppen, Meyen, and Rutenberg, and hence had to resort to "third rate" thinkers (*Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 3. [Berlin: Dietz, 1960], 105).

⁴⁶⁴ *MECW* 4, 7; hereafter cited parenthetically.

Engels, the Bauers use a language that is abstract and illogical. This, too, is a claim pursued in *The German Ideology*.

One of the most important claims advanced by Marx and Engels is that, apart from falsifying history and doing so in a confused and manner, the “critical critics” are so preoccupied with their own clashes with the political establishment that they come to attribute more significance to their personal conflicts than to the larger social conflicts. In his discussion of Jungnitz’s, or “Herr J.’s,” article on Karl Nauwerck’s “collision” with the Philosophy Faculty in Berlin, Engels claims, for instance, that “[c]riticism, being accustomed to considering the Bonn affair [i.e. Bauer’s dismissal] as the event of the century” (*CW* 4, 17) inappropriately exaggerates the significance of its oppositional stance *vis-à-vis* the state as “epoch-making” (*ibid.*, 18). That is, history is believed to take place in the domain of thought, the realm of the thinker. This means that the critic, specifically Bauer, is unaware of his own (specific) position in the historically determined social arrangement, which is fraught with structural contradictions and movements.

The abnegation of real, sensuous practice by Bauerian criticism is problematized for its quasi-religious character in *The Holy Family* just as it is later in *The German Ideology*. However, it is important to remember that practice is still very much defined by Marx and Engels in romantic terms, terms that they were to renounce only a year later. But before the critique of religion becomes a problem in itself in *The German Ideology*, *The Holy Family* includes critical criticism in the generalized critique of religion, which was the Young Hegelian trademark. However, even *The German Ideology* still relies on the critique of religion writ large that we find in all the works of the Young Hegelians.

For example, Bruno Bauer is depicted as a nervous monk who equates the material with sin. In *The Holy Family*, Marx and Engels have not yet distanced themselves from the critique of religion as such, and, looked at from Marx and Engels's later perspective, their own notion of sensuous reality is itself still quasi-religious. For instance, Engels ridicules as pious Edgar Bauer's disparaging remarks about love and passion as inferior faculties.⁴⁶⁵ Similarly, Marx chastises Bauer for his fear of objectivity, maintaining that it is essentially a Christian attitude, and exclaims *apropos* Feuerbach that in reality, "love is an *un-Critical, unchristian materialist*" (*CW* 4, 22). Taking issue with Bauer's argument that material things and experiences are forms of alienation or abstraction, Marx insists that sensuous love cannot be conceived abstractly and charges that only in "*speculative terminology . . . the concrete is called abstract and the abstract concrete*" (*ibid.*, 23). (Hegel, as is known, conceived the abstract as the common, superficial perception of reality and the concrete as reality "revealed" through consciousness, i.e. understood philosophically.) Against this, Marx relies on Feuerbach's Hegel critique when he asserts that reality is concrete and sensuousness is concrete reality: Love, he says, "takes place in the world of the senses and between real individuals" (*ibid.*).

But Marx and Engels do not remain on the level of philosophy; rather, they engage in debates over politics and economics, disputing, for instance, the critical critics' approach to the issue of labor. For example, they argue that Edgar Bauer's critique of alienation is wrong-headed. Edgar Bauer had argued that because work was compartmentalized under capitalism, the workers do not produce anything. Engels, in

⁴⁶⁵ It is possible to detect in Engels's critique a critique of the sexist assumptions underlying the material-ideal dichotomy. Just as in *The German Ideology*, where Bruno Bauer is accused of being afraid of women, Engels charges in *The Holy Family* that Edgar Bauer's concept of love as a "cruel goddess" who precipitates "suicide" — as opposed to what Bauer calls the "tranquility of knowledge" — is not a being apart but "the objective world outside" (*CW* 4, 21) the ivory tower of pure thought.

turn, responds that while the workers may not produce anything “whole,” they do not therefore produce “nothing” but rather “everything” – in spite of, or precisely because of, the alienated conditions under which they work (*CW* 4, 19). Interestingly, this argument connects the Hegelian-Marxian conception of work as one of the motive forces of history and the later Marx’s labor theory of value. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels reinforce the idea of the historical primacy of production and the revolutionary agency of the producer.

When Marx and Engels wrote *The Holy Family*, they were not yet critical of Proudhon and defended him against the German “radicals.” In this defense, they emphasized Proudhon’s scientific advances over the speculative philosophies in Germany. Edgar Bauer, for instance, is further challenged by Marx, in a painstaking commentary and textual comparison, on his critical translation of Proudhon. Marx alleges that Bauer’s Proudhon has nothing whatsoever to do with Proudhon’s actual theories. Marx demonstrates that the “mass-type”⁴⁶⁶ Proudhon (or “real Proudhon”), unlike the “Critical Proudhon” (or “characterized Proudhon”) who is reconciled with German idealist fantasies, has revolutionized political economy by questioning the notion of private property, a unique achievement that the critical critics have not begun to understand” (*CW* 4, 32-3). Marx further defends Proudhon, whom Edgar Bauer reprimands for setting up “justice” as history’s “eternal foundation,” as the “god that guides mankind” (quoted *ibid.*, 33), by maintaining that theories of the world-historical task of the proletariat are not about “aims” but rather about “being” (*ibid.*, 37), an argument that also became central to Marx’s critique of Stirner. Later, Marx would

⁴⁶⁶ This is an ironic reference to critical criticism’s dismissive attitude toward the masses.

embark on a full-scale attack on Proudhon, advancing criticisms against the French anarchist that were not altogether different from Bauer's criticisms of Proudhon.

At the same time, while the group around the Bauers, just like Stirner, consistently viewed communism as another form of theoretical idealism, Marx and Engels insisted that communism was first and foremost a *practical* movement, not a philosophical system. They begin to develop their theory that, unlike philosophical abstractions, concrete practice emerges in the direct confrontation with the existing economic contradictions. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels specify this notion more explicitly by speaking of the revolt of the forces of production against the relations of production, but even in *the Holy Family*, they distinguish between socialist theories that are out of touch with the material reality of the masses and the proletarian struggle against their conditions of existence.

At this point, it may be remarked that for Marx and Engels, the revolutionary struggle is always both economic and political. It is a mistake to distinguish between the revolutionary politics and economic forces, as the two are intimately connected. Ellen Meiksins Wood argues this fact very convincingly in her essay "The separation of the 'economic' and the 'political' in capitalism," where she maintains that while "capitalism is marked by a unique differentiation of the 'economic' sphere. . . . [because] the appropriation of surplus labour takes place in the 'economic' sphere by 'economic' means," the economic domain is irreducibly social and political.⁴⁶⁷ In reconsidering the base-superstructure paradigm, Meiksins Wood wants to:

overcome the false dichotomy that permits some Marxists to accuse others of abandoning the "field of economic realities" when they concern themselves with

⁴⁶⁷ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 28.

the political and social factors that constitute relations of production and exploitation. The premise here is that there is no such thing as a mode of production *in opposition* to “social factors,” and that Marx’s radical innovation on bourgeois political economy was precisely to define the mode of production and economic laws themselves in terms of “social factors.”⁴⁶⁸

This inextricable connection between the economic and the political, which is an integral aspect of Marx’s thinking, does not contradict the equally crucial distinction between base and superstructure, for the “idealistic superstructure,” as Marx and Engels put it in *The German Ideology*, is the realm of political “phrases”; material practice, on the other hand, is the *foundation* of history.

Marx’s vindication of Proudhon was also a critique of the Bauerian interpretation of Hegel’s dialectic. Bauer justified his dismissal of communism by appropriating the concept of the unity of opposites in a conservative manner. The idea was that the contradiction between private property and the proletariat was a *logical* necessity and that the polarity would ultimately reveal itself in human *self-consciousness* as a harmony. Marx counters that contradictions are only structurally necessary insofar as they are also historical; the opposing poles do not complement each other but produce a new term through destruction and *Aufhebung* in reality. The relevant passage is worth quoting here:

It is not sufficient to declare them two sides of a single whole.

Private property as private property, as wealth, is compelled to maintain *itself*, and thereby its opposite, the proletariat, in *existence*. That is the *positive* side of the antithesis, self-satisfied private property.

The proletariat, on the contrary, is compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, private property, which determines its existence, and which makes it proletariat. It is the *negative* side of the antithesis, its restlessness within its very self, dissolved and self-dissolving private property.

The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-estrangement. But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-estrangement, it recognises estrangement as *its own power* and has in it the *semblance* of a human existence. The latter feels annihilated in estrangement; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence. It is to

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 24.

use an expression of Hegel, in its abasement the *indignation* at that abasement, an indignation to which it is necessarily driven by the contradiction between its human *nature* and its condition of life, which is the outright, resolute and comprehensive negation of that nature. Within this antithesis the private property-owner is therefore the *conservative* side, the proletarian the *destructive* side. From the former arises the action of preserving the antithesis, from the latter the action of annihilating it. (*CW* 4, 35-6)

Interestingly, this discussion of alienation as an unbearable predicament affecting the whole society and yet as a privilege for some of its members and a curse for most everybody else reappears in exactly the same form in *Capital*.⁴⁶⁹ More importantly in the present context, however, alienation is conceived by Marx and Engels as the product and condition of class struggle, with the emphasis always on the negative moment, which is not romanticized but described in terms of a life and death struggle.

The Holy Family articulates the detachment of the thinker from material reality as unequivocally as *The German Ideology*. It can even be argued that Marx and Engels begin to set out in *The Holy Family* a theory of the philosopher as imprisoned in his limited mode of activity. This is evident in a passage where, returning Edgar Bauer's charge that Proudhon views possession as a supreme "category,"⁴⁷⁰ Marx maintains that only critical criticism sees categories everywhere and is concerned only with the critique of categories and "phrases": religion. Here, we see early traces of the argument that the critique of religion is not adequate unless it is complemented with a scientifically sound study of social reality. This argument is tied directly to the claim that philosophy is a form of practice that is unpractical in the sense of being an activity that is characterized precisely by its detachment from the activities of vast majority of people. Marx acknowledges that there are some problems with Proudhon's reliance on the traditional

⁴⁶⁹ See chapter 5.

⁴⁷⁰ In a memorable passage, Marx emphasizes instead that Proudhon sees the condition of 'not possessing' as "a most dismal reality" and adds that destitution is the most absolute reality of unreality (*CW* 4, 42).

political economy concept of possession, but he ends up siding with Proudhon (and Feuerbach) against Edgar Bauer, declaring the latter's theory of the "overpracticality" of philosophy to be even more problematic. Whereas Bauer argued that philosophy had been too practical because it always merely abstracted from the existing state of things, rather than going beyond it, Marx maintained that philosophy never understood the existing state of things in the first place and therefore could not understand how it would be overcome. Thus, he states, "Philosophy was overpractical only in the sense that it soared above practice" (*CW* 4, 40).

In other words, Marx suggests that the philosophers' ignorance with respect to the real world is a very particular kind of ignorance that is based on the philosopher's assumption that there is ignorance all around him. The upshot of critical criticism's arrogance is the idea that the oppressed classes are mired in prejudices and delusions. Edgar Bauer, for example, claimed that the workers lack an awareness of their own collective power and that this lack of consciousness accounted for their wretched situation. In Marx's words, "[a]ccording to Critical Criticism, the whole evil lies only in the workers' thinking" (*CW* 4, 52). In reality, however, the workers

are most painfully aware of the *difference* between *being* and *thinking*, between *consciousness* and *life*. They know that property, capital, money, wage-labour and the like are not ideal figments of the brain but very practical, very objective products of their self-estrangement and that therefore they must be abolished in a practical, objective way for man to become man not only in *thinking*, in *consciousness*, but in mass *being*, in life. Critical Criticism, on the contrary, teaches them that they cease in reality to be wage-workers if in thinking they abolish the thought of wage-labour; if in thinking they cease to regard themselves as wage-workers and, in accordance with that extravagant notion, no longer let themselves be paid for their person. As absolute idealists, as ethereal beings, they will then naturally be able to live on the ether of pure thought. Critical Criticism teaches them that they abolish real capital by overcoming in *thinking* the category Capital. (*Ibid.*, 53).

Marx and Engels argue consistently against the Young Hegelian speculative devaluation of the material nature of social life and subordination of the concrete to the abstract. In *The German Ideology*, they maintain that actual events and empirical facts are metaphysically reduced to “examples” of general principles. A similar argument can already be found in *The Holy Family*. For example, in his discussion of Szélligá’s writings, Marx explains that speculative philosophy relegates sensuous life to irrelevance while declaring ideal constructs to be the substance or essence of things (*CW* 4, 57-8). Marx illustrates this point when he explains that the abstract concept of

fruit, which, in speculative manner, is taken to be the real identity of apples and pears alike. The fact that apples and pears are really two different things is thereby obscured. Even though speculative philosophy recognizes empirical diversity as part of the truth of the idea, it can never arrive at sensuous reality because it thinks that the apples, pears, almonds, and raisins that we rediscover in the speculative world are nothing but *semblances* of apples, *semblances* of pears, *semblances* of almonds and *semblances* of raisins, for they are moments in the life of “*the Fruit*,” this abstract *creation of the mind*, and therefore themselves abstract *creations of the mind*. Hence what is delightful in this speculation is to rediscover all the real fruits there, but as fruits which have a higher mystical significance, which have grown out of the ether of your brain and not out of the material earth, which are incarnations of “*the Fruit*,” of the *Absolute Subject*. When you return from the abstraction, the *supernatural* creation of the mind, “*the Fruit*,” to real *natural* fruits, you give on the contrary the natural fruits a supernatural significance and transform them into sheer abstractions. Your main interest is then to point out the *unity* of “*the Fruit*” in all manifestations of its life—the apples, the pear, the almond—that is, to show the *mystical interconnection* between these fruits, how in each one of them “*the Fruit*” realises itself by *degrees* and *necessarily* progresses, for instance, from its existence as a raisin to its existence as an almond. Hence the value of the ordinary fruits *no longer* consists in their *natural* qualities, *but* in their *speculative* quality, which gives each of them a definite place in the life-process of “*the Absolute Fruit*.” (Ibid., 59-60).

The inversion of category and reality is here criticized as a feature of Classical philosophy: the notion of pre-existing Ideal essences and sensuous things are mere approximations of such underlying, non-tangible essences.

Marx and Engels's consternation centers on Bruno Bauer's failure to recognize actually existing, real-historical subjectivity. Social life is viewed as abject objectivity with strong religious overtones. By declaring everything corporeal as passive matter, polluted *ab ovo*, speculative philosophy and its Young Hegelian malcontents effectively dispose of historical agents. Thus, Marx and Engels call Szeliga a "Critical parson" (*CW* 4, 63) and his interpretation of Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* an "admonitory sermon" of a "puritan" (*ibid.*, 64). Because Szeliga discusses sensuality as something that must be distrusted, perhaps feared, and definitely controlled, Marx argues that Szeliga only recognizes sensuality as "our nature" in order to subordinate it to the higher facility of reason (*ibid.*, 65). Even more to the point, Bruno Bauer's attempt to distance himself from his past political involvements following his *The Good Cause of Freedom* is ridiculed by Marx as similar to "the Christian ascetics who begin the campaign of the spirit against the flesh with the mortification of their *own* flesh" (*ibid.*, 99). To correct this view, objectivity must be grasped as intimately tied to subjectivity, and vice versa. In a mocking imitation of Hegelian terminology, Marx explains this by saying that "[i]n the speculative way of speaking, this operation is called comprehending *Substance* as *Subject*" (*ibid.*, 60).

For Marx and Engels, the ramifications of the elision of concrete historical actors in favor of an abstract Subject were serious. Perhaps the most disconcerting consequence was that peculiar arrogance that prompted Bauer to dismiss the struggles of the oppressed as fruitless and hence contemptible. The openly anti-materialist stance of Bauer must have bewildered and infuriated Marx. For all intents and purposes, Bauer's new pessimism was a 180 degree turn from his former prediction of the impending victory of

“the Mass.”⁴⁷¹ He had swung around so much as to produce a philosophy that “has derived its relative glory from Critical debasement, rejection and transformation of *definite* mass-type objects and persons . . . [and] now derives its *absolute* glory from the Critical debasement, rejection and transformation of the Mass in general” (*CW* 4, 78). In the meantime, Bauer had become the figure head of the Free and one of the most prominent spokespersons for the Young Hegelians, finally presenting himself as the “incarnation” of his “Absolute Criticism” (*ibid.*, 78), as Marx and Engels put it. The anger with which Marx attacks Bauer was therefore likely the expression of a deep disappointment.

Just as is the case with *The German Ideology*, the arguments over philosophy in *the Holy Family* occasionally take the form of a wrestling match over Feuerbach and Hegel. Feuerbach, however, is still fully endorsed by Marx and Engels whereas the question about Hegel is whether or not he has been successfully overcome. Engels, for example, dedicates a short essay to the denunciation of critical criticism’s appropriation of Feuerbach. In it, he claims that without really having understood Feuerbach’s *Philosophy of the Future*, the critical critics utilize its terminology, forcing it to agree with their own agenda, and robbing it of its radical sting. Feuerbach’s attack on philosophy becomes, in the hands of the critical critics, a celebration of philosophy, for they develop from his critique of abstract categories an abundance of new abstractions (*CW* 4, 92-3). This is why their polemic against philosophy is neither genuine nor effective, especially “as it [critical criticism] has never stirred a finger to dissolve philosophy” (*ibid.*, 93). Hegelian philosophy, therefore, was never overcome. The fact

⁴⁷¹ Marx specifically references here Bauer’s *The Good Cause of Freedom, and my Own Cause* and *The Jewish Question* (*CW* 4, 79).

that Bauer and his followers sought subjectivity everywhere except in actually existing people, locating it finally in History, conceived as a self-sufficient and self-moving entity, proves, according to Engels, that “Absolute Criticism, which has never freed itself from the cage of the Hegelian way of viewing things, [merely] storms at the iron bars and walls of its prison” (ibid., 92).

Ultimately, Marx and Engels maintain that Feuerbach had done more than anybody else to “de-Hegelize” critical philosophy and that Bauer’s positing of a metaphysical Truth was a direct return to Hegel. Just like Hegel, Bauer viewed real people as mere mannequins of a telos to be revealed, and, therefore, his concept of human Self-Consciousness did not constitute an advance over Hegel’s Consciousness:

For Herr Bauer, as for Hegel, truth is an *automaton* that proves itself. Man must *follow* it. As in Hegel, the result of real development is nothing but the *truth proven*, i.e., brought to *consciousness*. . . . Just as, according to the earlier theologians, plants exist to be eaten by animals, and animals to be eaten by men, history exists in order to serve as the act of consumption of theoretical eating – *proving* Man exists so that history may exist, and history exists so that the *proof of truth* exists. In this *Critically* trivialized form is repeated the speculative wisdom that man exists, and history exists, so that *truth* may arrive at *self-consciousness*. That is why *history*, like *truth*, becomes a person apart, a metaphysical subject of which the real human individuals are merely the bearers. (CW 4, 79)

Marx’s substitution of “real human individuals” for the abstract concept of “Man” is accompanied by the equally important shift from the philosophical question of knowledge to a theory of practice. *The Holy Family* brings out this shift very well. Marx begins by arguing that there are “self-evident” truths that are, Bauer’s claims to the contrary, well “apprehended” by the “masses” (ibid., 80). He also insists, and thereby prefigures one of the central arguments of *The German Ideology*, that revolutionary failures are not the result of people’s inadequate understanding of the situation. This leads

him to maintain that social transformation is not *only* a matter of thinking but also a matter of doing. By this, he appears to mean two things: 1) critical ideas *alone* do not accomplish anything, and 2) people's critical ideas emerge with their revolutionary actions. However, he remarks, "In Critical history . . . in historical actions it is not a matter of the acting masses, of empirical action, or of the empirical *interest* of this action, but instead is only 'a matter of an *idea in them*' . . ." (ibid., 82).

In the process of working out these ideas, Marx juxtaposes the Young Hegelian concept of ideal alienation and ideal liberation on the one hand and his own concept of material alienation and material liberation on the other. This distinction was to become Marx and Engels's starting point in *The German Ideology* and must be considered *the* defining moment of Marx's break with the Young Hegelians. Thus, he says,

But as those *practical* self-alienations of the mass exist in the real world in an outward way, the mass must fight them in an *outward* way. It must by no means hold these products of its self-alienation for mere *ideal* fantasies, mere *alienations of self-consciousness*, and must not wish to abolish *material* estrangement by purely *inward spiritual* action. As early as 1789 Loustalot's journal bore the motto:

The great appear great in our eyes
Only because we are kneeling.
Let us rise!⁴⁷²

But to rise it is not enough to do so in *thought* and to leave hanging over one's *real sensuously perceptible* head the *real sensuously perceptible* yoke that cannot be subtilised away with ideas. Yet *Absolute Criticism* has learnt from Hegel's *Phänomenologie* at least *the* art of converting *real objective* chains that exist *outside me* into *merely ideal*, *merely subjective* chains, existing *merely in me* and thus of converting all *external* sensuously perceptible struggles into pure struggles of thought. (Ibid., 82-3)

Very importantly, Marx should be taken to mean here not so much that the thinker can "change the world" if he can sever the real chains of exploitation and oppression. One reason for this is simply that an individual or a small minority cannot overthrow a given

⁴⁷² Note that the original cites this quote in French (82, note a).

social order, according to Marx. Another reason is that the “critic” is out of touch with social reality and must first recognize both the nature of the real chains of the existing mode of production and actually occurring revolutionary practices before he can engage in those same revolutionary practices. That is, Marx suggests that critique is ineffective and even reactionary as long as it views actual people as the “true enemy,” the “only adversary” (of Spirit). His experiences in France convinced him that the working class was not “indolent” or “self-complacent.” He even rejected the notion that they had a “craving for knowledge” (ibid., 84). The opposition between “Spirit” and “Mass” was in his eyes simply a Hegelian translation of the Christian distinction between spirit and matter, between God and the world (ibid., 85).

Ideal alienation, however, exists. It exists as a material fact, and it affects philosophers. This is precisely where Marx and Engels pick up in *The German Ideology* to develop their concept of mental labor. First, as I have already shown, they maintain that the philosophy of history imagines people as detached from History: It

presupposes an *Abstract* or *Absolute Spirit* which develops in such a way that mankind is a mere *mass* that bears the Spirit with a varying degree of consciousness or unconsciousness. Within *empirical*, exoteric history, therefore, Hegel makes a speculative, esoteric history, develop. The history of mankind becomes the history of the *Abstract Spirit* of mankind, hence a *spirit far removed from the real man*” (ibid., 85).

Then, they maintain that this tendency to imagine consciousness as separate from material life is really an expression or reflection of the peculiar situation of the philosopher who is occupied with cerebral activities only but does not recognize this situation as restrictive. Caught in this real alienation, the thinker imagines that his ideal creations precede him. This is a form of fetishization, though Marx and Engels do not use that term. Thus, we get Hegel’s notion of the role of the philosopher as both the voice of

Spirit (or Self-Consciousness, etc.) and as a figure that always arrives *post festum* (ibid., 85-6). According to Marx, Bruno Bauer overcomes Hegel's "half-heartedness" by declaring that criticism and finally he himself is not the embodiment of, but rather is *identical with*, the Absolute Spirit (ibid., 86). One might put it like this: The philosopher posits an ideal abstraction, eventually imagines himself to be one with this abstraction, and thereby reveals his own real abstraction: his alienated state in a society that is based, as Marx and Engels will argue in *The German Ideology*, on the division between mental and manual labor.

All the while, reality – really existing, social individuals – are also imagined abstractly and, what's more, theologically. Marx argues that Bauer has fabricated an *idea* of the working people. Through inversion, this Other is believed to be merely inert being: "On the one side is the Mass as the passive, spiritless, unhistorical, *material* element of history. On the other is *the Spirit, Criticism*, Herr Bruno and Co. as the active element from which all *historical* action proceeds. The act of transforming society is reduced to the *cerebral activity* of Critical Criticism" (CW 4, 86). In truth, "[t]he Mass, as the object of Critical Criticism, has nothing in common with the *real* masses. . . . *Critical Criticism's* mass is 'made' by Criticism itself" (ibid., 155). As far as criticism does have a concept of society, "this society is nothing but the *Critical heaven* from which the real world is excluded as being the *un-Critical hell*" (ibid., 98). For this reason, Bauer "solves" *The Jewish Question*, for example, by claiming that their religious emancipation will result in their political emancipation. In his critique of this notion, Marx claims that Bauer "did not know Jewry as a part of the real world but only as a part of *his* world, *theology*" (ibid., 109). Bauer, in other words, cannot get beyond his limited realm of

experience and remains a theologian and philosopher as he chews over “the old *Hegelian* cud” (ibid., 103).

Throughout the work but specifically in the section that refers back to Marx’s *On the Jewish Question*, Marx accuses Bauer of restricting his criticism to theological matters and, else, of turning all social and political matters into theological matters. Again, we can see here that Marx gradually distanced himself from the critique of religion, even though his concern at this point is still the need to go beyond the battle of critical philosophy against theology. Discussing Bauer’s early work, Marx asserts not only that *The Critique of the Synoptics* has “a completely *theological* foundation, since it is through and through *theological* criticism” (*CW* 4, 104) but also that his entire dispute with Strauß was nothing but a “family affair between ‘Bauer-theology’ and Strauß-theology” (ibid., 103).⁴⁷³ Commenting on Bauer’s political phase, Marx says that “[t]he political movement that began in the year 1840 redeemed Herr Bauer from *his conservative politics* and raised him for a moment to *liberal* politics. But here again politics was in reality only a *pretext* for theology” (ibid., 112). In other words, Bauer was never truly radical but merely wavered between conservatism and liberalism. One might add that Bauer’s ultimate retirement from politics demonstrated that conservatism and liberalism are two sides of the same coin. Marx, for his part, holds the fixation on

⁴⁷³ In a different passage, Marx makes a similar claim, referring to the Bauer-Strauß controversy as a quarrel within Hegelianism. Hegel had combined two philosophies—that of Spinoza (with the concept of Substance) and that of Fichte (with the concept of Self-Consciousness)—in his own (the philosophy of Absolute Spirit). This “necessarily antagonistic unity,” although it joined once more what had been separated (namely nature and man), continued to “metaphysically disguise” the outcome (*CW* 4, 139). The metaphysical veil was not lifted until Feuerbach arrived on the scene. The dispute between Strauß and Bauer was “a dispute *within Hegelian* speculation” because Strauß privileged the Spinozist/materialist aspect of Hegel while Bauer privileged the Fichtean/subjective idealist aspect of it. Therefore, both went beyond Hegel’s philosophy at the same time as they stayed behind it.

theological issues responsible and seems to imply that the inability to break this fixation makes visible the limitations of the practice of theology.

Bauer, for his part, however, had advanced a critique of materialism and argued, similar to Stirner, that it was a stage in the “historical” development of the human essence. It is this critique that Marx and Engels had to disable. Where Stirner envisioned the end of history as a union of materialism and idealism, Bauer viewed history as the transcendence of metaphysical idealism by a humanist idealism; materialism was considered a tool in the process. Even more than Stirner, however, Bauer was firmly invested in the German tradition and deeply averse to French philosophy. He firmly believed that the idealism of “infinite self-consciousness” (*CW* 4, 137) was the truth of materialism (*ibid.* 140). Having emigrated to France, Marx did not share these patriotic investments and intervenes by bringing Hegelian idealism closer to French materialist philosophy and holding up communism as their logical successor. Humanist materialism, expressed theoretically in Feuerbach’s work and practically in the socialists’ activities, is claimed to be the historical heir of this movement away from metaphysics. There is no return for idealism. The section on “d) Critical Battle Against French Materialism,” Marx puts it as follows:

[T]he French Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and in particular *French materialism*, was not only a struggle against the existing political institutions and the existing religion and theology; it was just as much an *open, clearly expressed* struggle against the *metaphysics of the seventeenth century*, and against *all metaphysics*, in particular that of *Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza and Leibniz*. *Philosophy* was counterposed to *metaphysics*, just as *Feuerbach*, in his first resolute attack on *Hegel*, counterposed *sober philosophy* to *wild speculation*. Seventeenth century *metaphysics*, driven from the field by the French Enlightenment, notably, by *French materialism* of the eighteenth century, experienced a *victorious and substantial restoration* in *German philosophy*, particularly in the *speculative German philosophy* of the nineteenth century. After *Hegel* linked it in a masterly fashion with all subsequent metaphysics and with

German idealism and founded a metaphysical universal kingdom, the attack on theology again corresponded, as in the eighteenth century, to an attack on *speculative metaphysics* and *metaphysics in general*. It will be defeated for ever by *materialism*, which has now been perfected by the work of *speculation* itself and coincides with *humanism*. But just as *Feuerbach* is the representative of *materialism* coinciding with *humanism* in the *theoretical* domain, French and English *socialism* and *communism* represent *materialism* coinciding with *humanism* in the *practical* domain. (*CW* 4, 125)

The victory of the materialist approach is thus conceived as a historical necessity. After a short discussion of two historical forms of materialism—mechanical materialism (*via* Descartes’ physics [rather than his metaphysics] and represented by the natural sciences and their practitioners, such as Le Roy, Cabanis, and La Mettrie) on the one hand, and Democritean/Epicurean materialism (represented by Gassendi and Hobbes), which had been the subject of Marx’s dissertation, on the other—Marx explains that materialism’s triumph was due to the process of secularization, which France underwent during the eighteenth century:

[T]he downfall of seventeenth-century metaphysics can be explained . . . by the practical nature of French life at the time. This life was turned to the immediate present, to worldly enjoyment and worldly interests, to the *earthly* world. Its anti-theological, anti-metaphysical, materialistic practice demanded corresponding anti-theological, anti-metaphysical, materialistic theories. Metaphysics had *in practice* lost all credit. (*CW* 4, 126).

The emergence of science at the beginning of the eighteenth century left metaphysics behind. The latter was still concerned with “beings of thought and heavenly things at the same time when real beings and earthly things began to be the centre of all interest” (*ibid.*, 126). As a result, “Metaphysics became insipid” (*ibid.*). In this context, Marx mentions not only Pierre Bayle⁴⁷⁴, the subject of Feuerbach’s book *Pierre Bayle* (1838),

⁴⁷⁴ Marx pays his tribute Feuerbach by agreeing with him that Bayle was the father of philosophical materialism:

The man who deprived seventeenth-century metaphysics and metaphysics in general of all *credit* in the domain of theory was *Pierre Bayle*. His weapon was *skepticism*. . . . Just as *Feuerbach* by combating speculative theology was driven further to combat *speculative philosophy*, precisely because he recognised in speculation the last prop of theology, because he had to force theology to retreat from

but also the most important influences for *idéologues*: Helvétius and Condillac. Other names that appear here are Holbach, Volney, Dupuis, and Diderot. It must be noted at this point that Marx uses the term “ideologists” only in *this* particular context (ibid., 123), which consolidates my argument – developed in detail in the following chapters – that Marx’s ideology critique was an effort to go beyond the critique of metaphysics.

There is thus a direct connection between material conditions and consciousness. English materialism, for example, was viewed by Marx and Engels as a product of economic development. The fact that England was economically the most advanced country in Europe leads Marx to cite John Locke and the school of nominalism to argue that “[m]aterialism is the *natural-born* son of *Great Britain*” (ibid., 127) with Francis Bacon as “the real progenitor of *English materialism*” (ibid., 128). According to Marx, Bacon’s insistence on the infallibility of sense experience was and remained the center piece of materialist thought.

The unity of practice and theory is apparent in Marx’s further elaborations of eighteenth-century materialism, which he argues has a necessary connection with a humanist politics. Socialism and communism are thus intimately tied materialist philosophy, conceivably because they are rooted in one and the same historical development. Marx’s thoroughly Feuerbachian framework in *The Holy Family* is clearly apparent here:

pseudo-science to *crude*, repulsive *faith*, so Bayle too was driven by religious doubt to doubt about the metaphysics which was the prop of that faith. He therefore critically investigated metaphysics in its entire historical development. He became its historian in order to write the history of its death. he refuted chiefly *Spinoza* and *Leibniz*.

Pierre Bayle not only prepared the reception of materialism and of the philosophy of common sense in France by shattering metaphysics with his skepticism. He heralded the *atheistic society* which was soon to come into existence by *proving* that a society consisting only of atheists is *possible*, that an atheist *can* be a man worthy of respect, and that it is not by atheism but by superstition and idolatry that man debases himself” (CW 4, 127).

There is no need for any great penetration to see from the teaching of materialism on the original goodness and equal intellectual endowment of men, the omnipotence of experience, habit and education, and the influence of environment on man, the great significance of industry, the justification of enjoyment, etc., how necessarily materialism is connected with communism and socialism. If man draws all his knowledge, sensation, etc., from the world of the senses and the experience gained in it, then what has to be done is to arrange the empirical world in such a way that man experiences and becomes accustomed to what is truly human in it and that he becomes aware of himself as man. If correctly understood interest is the principle of all morality, man's private interest must be made to coincide with the interest of humanity. . . . If man is shaped by environment, his environment must be made human. If man is social by nature, he will develop his true nature only in society, and the power of his nature must be measured not by the power of the separate individual but by the power of society. (*CW* 4, 131)

The point at which the French materialist thinkers failed is precisely the point at which the materialist science of society achieves a break-through: namely when the theorist realizes that consciousness *is practical*. Marx notes that Condillac developed the idea that since sense experience is a product of habit and environment, education must be essential to civilization (*ibid.*, 129), and that Helvétius conceived of reform as possible only on the basis of a “transformation of consciousness,” which amounts to the imperative of “abolishing ignorance” (*ibid.*, 133). However, both viewed the transformation of consciousness as something that had to be brought to people from the outside, not as a process inherent in the social dynamic. While not nearly as opposed to the idea of false and correct consciousness as *The German Ideology*, *The Holy Family* already establishes that minds change in tandem with revolutionary social practice. In the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx concretized this further by criticizing that “[t]he materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated.”⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁵ *CW* 5, 7.

The solipsism of the critic who thinks of himself as the supreme educator is thus made ridiculous. Refusing to recognize historically specific, social subjects, Bauer's philosophy ends up being an "exclusive, unmitigated idealism," which "distinguishes nothing real from itself," transforms reality into "appearance" and "fantasy," and is finally "no longer disturbed even by the semblance of an external world" (*CW* 4, 140). Bauer, according to Marx,

does not recognise any *being* distinct from thought, any *natural energy* distinct from the *spontaneity of the spirit*, any *power of human nature* distinct from *reason*, any *passivity* distinct from *activity*, any *influence of others* distinct from *one's own action*, any *feeling* or *willing* distinct from *knowing*, any *heart* distinct from the *head*, any *object* distinct from the *subject*, any *practice* distinct from *theory*, any *man* distinct from the *Critic*, any *real community* distinct from *abstract generality*, any *Thou* distinct from *I*." (Ibid., 141-2)

It could be argued that Marx reverts back to a simplistic dualism in passages such as this one; however, one might also read Marx's critique of Bauer's elitism as a critique of the Enlightenment cult of human rationality (expressed in Bauer's notion of the critic as free from all *human passions* [ibid., 161]), though in this case, one might observe that Marx's attempts to displace Enlightenment humanism border themselves on its twin opposite: Romantic humanism. At the same time, Bauer's dreamy asceticism signals a deeply romantic withdrawal from the world that betrays his own omnipotence. In his imagination, the world becomes dependent upon Bauer's critical work, and Bauer become the world's redeemer. Having rejected "as *stubborn mass* and *matter* the *rest of the world*" (ibid., 142), he is perplexed to see that "the rest of the world" does not want to be redeemed. Quixotically, he is convinced that people should look to the principles of critical criticism, which, however, is "devoid of any further interest for the Mass" (ibid., 143).

One way to articulate the problem with Bauer's critical approach is that it missed its target, and it was predisposed to do so. Rather than attack the workers and the poor, he should have attacked the material conditions under which they live. Isaiah Berlin describes Marx and Engels's critique of Young Hegelian intellectualism as follows:

They [the Young Hegelians] believe that the mere existence of a fastidious critical *elite*, raised by its intellectual gifts above the philistine mob, will itself effect the emancipation of such sections of humanity as are worthy of it. This belief in the power of a frigid detachment from the social and economic struggle to effect a transformation of society, is regarded as academicism run mad, an ostrich-like attitude which will be swept away, like the rest of the world to which it belongs, by the real revolution which could not, it was clear, now be long in coming” (*Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* [New York: Time, 1963], 118).

This academicism was always conceived by Marx and Engels as structural. The hatred toward workers and their concrete struggles was viewed by them as a structurally determined inability to see beyond the narrow confines of the microcosm of the philosopher, in this case even more narrowly “the Holy Family of Charlottenburg” (ibid., 144). It would seem that Marx was not entirely justified in condemning the exclusionary tactics of the Bauer group because, obviously, he too was in the process of separating himself from his former allies. However, Marx realized astutely that Bauer's exclusion of the majority of people from the “world-historical” task of negation was in need of an explanation. First in *The Holy Family*, and then more systematically in *The German Ideology*, Marx develops the theory that Bauer's cult of the philosopher and his cynical transformation into the “hermit of Rixdorf”⁴⁷⁶ was not a unique occurrence but a historical and social phenomenon.

⁴⁷⁶ Rixdorf is the name of the suburb of Berlin where Bruno Bauer retired.

Perhaps the most important reason why *The Holy Family* is relevant for our understanding of *The German Ideology* is because it contains an embryonic form of the Marxian critique of ideology *qua* mental labor. In *The Holy Family*, Marx and Engels put forward a critique of ivory-tower intellectual practice which anticipates their argument in *The German Ideology* that mental labor, even while it detaches itself from concrete reality, is nevertheless inextricably tied to it. That is, the separation of the state-salaried thinker from the working class is precisely what prohibits Bauer's Absolute Criticism from ever entering "into a truly *social* relation to a *real object*." It "sits enthroned in the solitude of *abstraction*." On the other hand, the separation of mental labor from the rest of society does not mean that the thinker is separated from the society in which he lives and works: "Incidentally, the solitude which it achieves by isolating and abstracting itself from *everything* is no more free from the object from which it abstract itself than *Origen* was from the *genital organ* that he *isolated* from himself" (*CW* 4, 158).

One of the effects of the detachment of the thinker is a moralist hypocrisy that Marx and Engels criticize not only in *The Holy Family* but also in *The German Ideology*. In their discussion of Szeliga's celebratory review of Eugène Sue's novels, for instance, they argue that the ruling classes like to divert attention away from class structure by blaming unfortunate circumstances on those affected by them. Szeliga had portrayed the protagonist of one of the works, Rudolph, Prince of Geroldstein, as a critical hero, a "man of ruthless criticism," a man of "pure criticism," "the first servant of the state of humanity" (*CW* 4, 162). In truth, however, both Rudolph and Sue are rich members of the dominant class who imagine that they will improve society by preaching morality to the poor, who are described as degenerates. In Sue's work, the reform of the soul that the

prostitute and the murderer are supposed to achieve is brought about through penance, preferably in absolute isolation either in a convent, in an asylum, or in prison in solitary confinement (ibid., 186). Marx illustrates how this “critical” penal theory, which reduces all social contradictions to crime and crime to individual depravity, is nothing but a glorification of the existing class hierarchy. Quoting Robert Owen, Marx argues that these juridico-political and ethical ideas accomplish “the consecration of differences in social rank” (quoted ibid., 188); they are what “sanctions what exists” (ibid., 191). Proposed solutions, such as the “Bank for the Poor” (ibid., 197), are “miracle cures” that are not meant to cure systemic causes, such as those of poverty. By contrast, truly radical criticism devotes all of its attention to the forces that are engaged in the practical overthrow of the system that forces the majority of the population into unfortunate circumstances. These forces are practical forces, and they had gained momentum in France and England. Thus, Marx and Engels maintain against Bauerian nationalism that unlike German “critical criticism,”

The criticism of the French and the English is not an abstract preternatural personality outside mankind; it is the *real human activity* of individuals who are active members of society and who suffer, feel, think and act as human beings. That is why their criticism is at the same time practical, their communism a socialism in which they give practical, concrete measures, and in which they not only think but even more act, it is the living, real criticism of existing society, the recognition of the causes of ‘the decay’ (Ibid., 153).

As far as German criticism is concerned, Marx and Engels spare no words to point out its shortcomings. The term “ideology” is not used in any general way, but its faulty logic is exposed as much as its conjuring tricks. Not only do Marx and Engels remark on two of the most significant maneuvers performed by Hegelian philosophy—the tendency to imagine that “results engender beginnings” (*CW* 4, 167) and the

transformation of “all questions from the form of common sense to the form of speculative reason” (ibid. 90), they also clearly set out some of the main principles of the critique of idealist thinking that were to become central to “I. Feuerbach” in *The German Ideology*. The following three passages illustrate this.

The first proposition of profane socialism rejects emancipation *in mere theory* as an illusion and for *real* freedom it demands besides the idealistic ‘*will*’ very tangible, very material conditions. How low ‘*the Mass*’ is in comparison with holy Criticism, the Mass which considers material, practical upheavals necessary even to win the time and means required merely to occupy itself with ‘*theory*’! (Ibid., 95)

Ideas can never lead beyond an old world order but only beyond the ideas of the old world order. Ideas *cannot carry out anything* at all. In order to carry out ideas, men are needed who can exert practical force. (Ibid., 119)

Of course, spiritualistic, *theological* Critical Criticism only knows (at least it imagines it knows) the main political, literary and theological acts of history. Just as it separates thinking from the senses, the soul from the body and itself from the world, it separates history from natural science and industry and sees the origin of history not in vulgar *material* production on earth but in vaporous clouds in the heavens. (Ibid. 150)

Here, we find three doctrines of historical materialism expressed before Marx and Engels wrote *The German Ideology*: Liberation requires concrete conditions and concrete revolutionary activity. Philosophy as exclusively mental labor will end with the abolition of class society and the division of labor. Idealism and historical science are diametrically opposed methods of approach.

Hence, while the details of the dispute between Marx, Engels, and Bruno Bauer have largely been forgotten, *The Holy Family* was an important text in Marx’s intellectual development, in particular in his development of the materialist dialectic of history. Based on a thoroughgoing critique of the Young Hegelian philosophy that derived the concrete from the abstract and subordinated “practical practice” to “categorical categories” (*CW* 4, 153), *The Holy Family* marks another crucial moment in Marx’s

process of coming to terms with Hegel's legacy. Already in the 1843 piece "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing," written as a letter to Arnold Ruge, Marx argues: "Now philosophy has become worldly, and . . . the philosophical consciousness has been drawn . . . into the stress of the battle."⁴⁷⁷ He maintains that rather than conceiving "dogmatic abstractions," the ruthless critic must get his (or her) hands dirty: "Nothing prevents us, then, from tying our criticism to the criticism of politics and to a definite party position in politics, and hence from identifying our criticism with real struggles."⁴⁷⁸ However, this early essay was still rooted in the philosophical assertion of the need for a "reform of consciousness." In *The Holy Family*, however, one can begin to see a more systematically materialist challenge to the idealist philosophy of history. As my reading of the text has shown, Marx and Engels's polemical point is that ideas are not in themselves a materially effective force of social development. Further, ideas do not come to the historical process from the outside; they are always already an aspect of history. A comparison of a passage from "For a Ruthless Criticism" with a passage from *The Holy Family* illustrates the shift:

We only show the world what it is fighting for, and consciousness is something that the world *must* acquire, like it or not.

The reform of consciousness consists *only* in enabling the world to clarify its consciousness, in waking it from its dream about itself, in *explaining* to it the meaning of its own actions. Our whole task can consist only in putting religious and political questions into self-conscious human form—as is also the case in Feuerbach's criticism of religion.

Our motto must therefore be: Reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but through analyzing the mystical consciousness, the consciousness which is unclear to itself, whether it appears in religious or political form. Then it will transpire that the world has long been dreaming of something that it can acquire if only it becomes conscious of it. It will transpire that it is not a matter of drawing a great dividing line between past and future, but of carving out the thoughts of the past.

⁴⁷⁷ Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W W Norton & Company, 1978), 13.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

And finally, it will transpire that mankind begins no *new* work, but consciously accomplishes its old world.⁴⁷⁹

Because Hegel . . . substitutes *self-consciousness* for *man*, the *most varied* manifestations of human reality appear only as *definite* forms, as *determinateness of self-consciousness*. But mere determinateness of self-consciousness is a ‘*pure category*’, a mere ‘*thought*’, which I can consequently also transcend in ‘*pure*’ thought and overcome through pure thought. In Hegel’s *Phänomenologie* the *material, sensuously perceptible, objective* foundations of the various estranged forms of human self-consciousness are allowed to *remain*. The whole destructive work results in the *most conservative philosophy* because it thinks it has overcome the *objective world*, the sensuously perceptible real world, by transforming it into a ‘*Thing of Thought*’, a mere *determinateness of self-consciousness*, and can therefore also dissolve its opponent, which has become *ethereal*, in the ‘*ether of pure thought*.’ The *Phänomenologie* is therefore quite consistent in that it ends by replacing human reality by ‘*absolute knowledge*’—*knowledge*, because this is the only mode of existence of man--*absolute knowledge* for the very reason that self-consciousness knows *only itself* and is no longer disturbed by any objective world. Hegel makes man the *man of self-consciousness* instead of making self-consciousness the *self-consciousness of man*, of real man, i.e., of man living also in a real, objective world and determined by that world. He stands the world *on its head* and can therefore *in his head* also dissolve all limitations, which nevertheless remain in existence *for bad sensuousness*, for *real man*. Moreover, everything that betrays the *limitations of general self-consciousness*—all sensuousness, reality, individuality of men and of their world—is necessarily held by him to be a limit. The whole of the *Phänomenologie* is intended to prove that *self-consciousness* is the *only reality* and *all reality*. (CW 4, 192-3).

The Early Marx

The Holy Family is generally considered an early work. However, there are elements in the early Marx’s thinking that suggest that the “break” with the Young Hegelians in 1845 was not simply a reaction to Stirner’s critique of Feuerbach. To wit, the rejection both of the elevation of the critic to the status of the “wise man,” and of philosophy to a position of “transcendent power” (CW 4, 7), as Marx and Engels put it in the Foreword to *The Holy Family*, was also a central feature of Marx’s pre-1845 work. The “Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State,” for example, is not yet “Marxist,” and yet it exhibits a

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 15.

concern with the problem of mental labor, which was to become a key concept in Marx's transition from humanism to communism. Lucio Colletti, who has stressed the importance of the pre-1845 texts in light of the mature theory of Marx, states the issue more generally: "It is a fact that (as critics have held) when Marx wrote the *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* he had not yet arrived at theoretical communism. He arrived at this goal in *the course of writing it*."⁴⁸⁰ Marx may not have had the "goal" of arriving at theoretical communism, but the process of engaging with Hegel's idealist philosophy of the state was crucial for Marx's mature conception of the direct relation between "civil society" (private property) and the state. Colletti further maintains that the "Critique" predated the truly original period of Marx's *oeuvre* but that it also marks the moment when Marx's work can be "seen as the progressive unfolding, as the ever-deepening grasp of a single problematic."⁴⁸¹

To begin with, Marx's early critique of philosophy helps us establish the meaning of the concept of ideology in *The German Ideology*. The work was written in 1843 and is a trenchant attack on Hegel's idealism, which makes it a Young Hegelian work. It was never published, but it constitutes an important moment in Marx's development. There is no mention of the proletariat yet, and there is no discussion of the materialist laws of history, but the political critique developed in these pages is nonetheless significant because it shows how much Marx was indebted to radical political theory (and not only radical philosophy) and how much the later Marx's analysis of bourgeois society was indebted to the earlier Marx's analysis of the bourgeois state. Focused on demonstrating

⁴⁸⁰ Colletti, "Introduction," 45.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 47.

that Hegel's philosophy is "uncritical mysticism,"⁴⁸² Marx lays out his critique of ideology without ever using the term.

One might say that Marx's critique of Hegel is from the beginning a critique of consciousness *qua* exclusively mental labor. He starts by arguing that, because he considered the State an absolute reality, rather than as the real abstraction that it is, Hegel never really considered actual reality: "Hegel makes no mention of empirical conflicts" (*EW*, 59). Marx maintains that Hegel constantly "subordinates" actual relations and laws (those governing civil society) to the political relations and laws operating in society, a point that was to become instrumental in the development of Marx's notion of the primacy of the economic instance in the social totality. As Colletti points out in his "Introduction," there is a connection between Marx's explanation of philosophical abstraction as objective abstraction in this text and his concept of the fetish in *Capital*.⁴⁸³ I argue that the continuity that exists between this text and the mature work is even more pronounced in the concept of ideology.⁴⁸⁴ If the chief materialist doctrine is that consciousness is contingent on social reality, "The Critique" confirms that Marx did not refer to consciousness in a general sense but to consciousness as that produced by the thinker.

The idea that philosophy inverts the abstract and the concrete is perhaps *the* central theme in "The Critique." Science is to correct this inversion. Marx states:

The real relationship is described by speculative philosophy as *appearance*, as *phenomenon*. . . . [Further, the] *real mediation* . . . [is] merely the *appearance of a mediation* which the real Idea performs on itself and which takes place behind the scenes. Reality is not deemed to be itself but another reality instead. The ordinary

⁴⁸² Marx, *Early Writings*, 149; hereafter cited parenthetically.

⁴⁸³ Colletti, "Introduction," 33.

⁴⁸⁴ I will demonstrate later that "ideology" and "fetish" are not the same concept.

empirical world is not governed by its own mind but by a mind alien to it. (*EW*, 62)

In truth, however, “[t]he family and civil society are the preconditions of the state; they are the true agents; but in speculative philosophy it is the reverse” (*ibid.*). As a speculative philosopher, Hegel inverts the “driving forces” of history and their products. The political consequence is that “empirical reality is accepted as it is; it is even declared to be rational . . . because the empirical fact in its empirical existence has a meaning other than itself” (*ibid.*, 63). Beyond the fact that Hegel’s philosophy is conservative, when looked at from this angle, Marx maintains throughout the entire text that philosophy of the Idea does not advance our knowledge of society. In *The German Ideology*, this argument has morphed into the ideology—materialist science distinction. In *The Critique*, Marx maintains already that

[o]ur general definitions do not advance our understanding. An explanation, however, which fails to supply the *differentia* is *no* explanation at all. Hegel’s sole concern is simply to re-discover ‘the Idea’, the ‘logical Idea’, in every sphere, whether it be the state or nature, whereas the real subjects, in this case the ‘political constitution’, are reduced to mere *names* of the Idea so that we are left with no more than the appearance of true knowledge. They are and remain uncomprehended because their specific nature has not been grasped” (*Ibid.*, 67).

The ideological process is described in Feuerbachian language, and at the same time, Marx emphasizes from the outset *historical practice* over abstract essences. Certainly, the terminology is taken directly from Feuerbach. For instance, Marx describes distortion as the inversion of “soul” and “body” (*EW*, 70), a the invention of agents and substantiality where there are only abstractions (*ibid.*, 72), and the confusion of subjects and predicates, form and content, and thought and nature (*ibid.*, 73-75). Where there should be a solid understanding of the empirical conditions of liberation, the “muddle” and “folly” of Hegel’s philosophy, which “twists the empirical fact into a metaphysical

axiom” (ibid., 82), attributes freedom to the concept rather than to actually existing people in their “species-forms.” But it is important to note that the term “Man” is used as often as the term “people.” Criticizing Hegel’s philosophy of the state, for instance, Marx says: “Just as if people were not the real state. The state is an abstraction. Only the people is a concrete reality” (ibid., 84-86). Of course, the singular noun “the people” is not as concrete as the plural noun “the people,” but Marx asserts forcefully that philosophy that charts only the history of the Idea, rather than actual human “activity,” is not historical at all. Thus emphasizing the less radical aspects of Hegel’s thought, Marx polemicizes: “Hegel’s purpose is to narrate the life-history of abstract substance, of the Idea, and in such a history human activity etc. necessarily appears as the activity and product of something other than itself” (ibid.).

The sheer repetitiveness of the accusations against Hegel is significant in and of itself as it illustrates the process by which Marx worked through the all-pervasive effects of the idealizing stance of the philosopher in order to arrive at a general theory of ideology. Marx does not yet view Hegel’s “transformation of the empirical into the speculative and the speculative into the empirical” (*CW* 4, 98) as a general tendency affecting the philosophers in general, nor does he make recourse to the division of labor in explaining Hegel’s idealism, but in the *German Ideology*, just a few years later, Marx and Engels would argue that ideal abstraction is “what lies nearest to hand” not only in the case of Hegel, as Marx implies here, but in the case of all ideologists. Hegel thus becomes an archetype of the thinker who portrays himself as being endowed with a “*mystical profundity*” and who sublimates the “vulgar” facts as “the human incarnation of God at every stage” (ibid., 99). The “Critique,” however, is concerned only with Hegel

and with how in his work “the true way is turned upside down.” Only in the *Theses* and *The German Ideology* Marx begins to elaborate more systematically on the “true way” and true starting point of science: the material basis of human relations.⁴⁸⁵

If there are, then, continuities between the early Marx and the transitional Marx, these continuities consist largely in the critical analysis of idealist philosophy. It is this critique that is was to become the critique of ideology in 1845/46. We may sum up the preceding discussion by saying that, in order to understand the context within which Marx conceived his critique of ideology, it is necessary to grasp the essential connection between Marx’s writings in the early 1840s and *The German Ideology*. For the same reason, it is helpful to examine *The German Ideology* in terms of how it continues the attack on the Young Hegelians in the same spirit as the immediately preceding writings. Of particular interest in this regard is the critique of Bruno Bauer in *The German Ideology*. This short section, titled “II. Saint Bruno,” was not intended as a detailed discussion but rather as an afterthought to Marx and Engels’s engagement with Bauer’s “absolute criticism.” While relatively unsubstantial, the essay is interesting nonetheless—primarily for the paradigmatic way in which it problematizes Hegelian idealism.

Bauer’s article “Charakteristik Ludwig Feuerbachs” serves Marx and Engels as another object lesson in their critique of speculative thought. Once again, we see that argument that the philosopher mistakes philosophical questions for “world-historic, even absolute questions.” Bauer’s prediction of “the triumph of self-consciousness over substance” is ridiculed as absurd posturing. Thus, Marx and Engels polemicize that Bauer “continues to prance about on his old-Hegelian war horse . . . [making] revelations from the Kingdom of God” (*CW* 5, 98), oblivious of the fact that even Young Hegelianism was

⁴⁸⁵ *MECW* 5, 99-100; hereafter cited parenthetically.

a thing of the past. Predicting “the triumph of self-consciousness over substance” (ibid), Bauer chooses not to relinquish the metaphysical investments that he inherited from Hegel. As a result, he is incapacitated and helpless in the face of real social contradictions. The argument developed here is not fundamentally different from that laid out in *The Holy Family*:

The abstract and nebulous expression into which a real collision is distorted by Hegel is held by this “critical” mind to be the real collision itself. . . . A philosophical *phrase* about a real question is for him the real question itself. Consequently, on the one hand, instead of real people and their real consciousness of their social relations . . . he has the mere abstract expression: *self-consciousness*, just as, instead of real nature and the actually existing social relations, he has the philosophical summing-up of all the philosophical categories or names of these relations in the expression: *substance*; for Bruno, along with all philosophers and ideologists, erroneously regards thoughts and ideas—the independent intellectual expression of the existing world—as the basis of this existing world. It is obvious that with these two abstractions, which have become senseless and empty, he can perform all kinds of tricks without knowing anything at all about real people and their relations. . . . Hence he does not forsake the speculative basis in order to solve the contradictions of speculation; he manoeuvres while remaining on that basis, and he *himself* still stands so much on the specifically Hegelian basis that the relation of “self-consciousness” to the “absolute spirit” still gives him no peace. (Ibid., 99)

The use of the phrase “social relations” appears to be deliberate, however, and may indicate the anti-humanist turn in Marx’s thinking, as a result of having read Stirner’s Feuerbach critique.

Once again, Marx and Engels declare the critique of false consciousness to be a specifically philosophical conceit. For one, they find Bauer’s “continual dependence on Hegel” evident in his reliance on “intricate tautologies” and his construction of “concepts of concepts and abstractions of abstractions” (*CW* 4, 100). Moreover, Marx and Engels do not tire of pointing out “how firmly he believes in the power of the philosophers and how he shares their illusion that a modified consciousness, a new turn given to the

interpretation of existing relations, could overturn the whole hitherto existing world.”

Bauer’s intellectualism is made worse by his egoism and his limitless faith in his own “world-shattering ideas” (ibid., 100-1). Quoting from Bauer’s critique of Feuerbach, Marx and Engels charge Bauer with fabricating idealist “nonsense,” like the idea that “the actual relations of individuals [are] dependent on the philosophical interpretation of these relations” (ibid., 102). While some of their comments are clearly meant to be entertaining as well as accurate, Marx and Engels are quite sincere when they assert that Bauer has no grasp of the relation between material reality and philosophical abstractions: “He has not the slightest inkling of the correlation which exists between the concepts of Hegel’s ‘absolute spirit’ and Feuerbach’s ‘species’ on the one hand and the existing world on the other” (ibid.).

Whereas Marx and Engels were still under the influence of Feuerbach when they wrote *The Holy Family*, they tried to free themselves of this influence by the time they wrote *The German Ideology*. That is, within a very short time, Feuerbach’s concepts went from ubiquitous to few and far between. However, Feuerbach was a materialist, and he had given Marx key impulses to rethink his critical theories. For these reasons, Marx and Engels continued to defend Feuerbach against Bauer and Stirner, arguing that the latter’s interventions were significantly inferior to Feuerbach’s. This should not lead one to think, however, that *The German Ideology*’s pro-Feuerbach approach was the same as *The Holy Family*’s; after all, *The German Ideology* was operating on the basis of a radically de-essentialized, i.e. anti-romantic and anti-aesthetic, concept of human life.

Accordingly enough, then, the gist of their attack on Bauer *vis-à-vis* Feuerbach is that unlike Feuerbach’s critique of religion, Bauer’s philosophy was still fundamentally

religious. According to Marx and Engels, Bauer's critique of Feuerbach betrays the "true theological manner" of his thinking (*CW* 4, 97). Not only does he believe, with Feuerbach, that religion has an essence, he also construes this essence, in contrast to Feuerbach, in an explicitly anti-materialist fashion. He rejects Feuerbach's concept of sensuousness in the way that an ascetic views everything sensual. According to Marx and Engels, Bauer is "full of contempt for the world" (*ibid.*, 94) and detests all corporeality as corrupt and unreal. The quasi-Christian tone of Bauer's approach is parodied in passages such as the following:

How purified of all fleshly lusts and earthly desires our holy man now appears is shown by his vehement polemics against Feuerbach's *sensuousness*. Bruno by no means attacks the highly restricted way in which Feuerbach recognises *sensuousness*. He regards Feuerbach's unsuccessful attempt, since it is an attempt to escape ideology, as—a *sin*. Of course! Sensuousness is lust of the eye, lust of the flesh and arrogance—horror and abomination in the eyes of the Lord! (*Ibid.*, 103).

In a series of biblical references, Marx and Engels draw parallels between Bauer's elevation of conscious being over material being and Christianity's castigation of all that it considers licentious, immoral, obscene, and excessive. They maintain that Bauer treats materialist philosophers like Feuerbach as "lewd vilifiers who love voluptuousness more than criticism, makers of sinful gangs, in short, slaves of the flesh" (*ibid.*, 103). Finally, while they do not acknowledge Bauer's efforts to distinguish the secular Hegel from the theological Hegel, they reproach Bauer for not recognizing Feuerbach's "attempt to escape ideology." This selective criticism was due to the fact that Bauer never endeavored to theorize the material basis of social life in positive terms. Therefore, "Such people [who conceived the concretely material as active and real] are shunned by Saint

Bruno who is spiritually minded and loathes the stained covering of the flesh and for this reason he condemns Feuerbach” (ibid.).

If Bauer finds Feuerbach’s privileging of the senses inadequate (because it leaves out man’s “innermost essence”), Marx and Engels find Bauer’s critique of Feuerbach even more inadequate. Especially the equation of the sensuous and the sexual is based on a flawed understanding of what Feuerbach tried to do and how his philosophy might be corrected. Bauer’s critique is misdirected. “Sensuousness” is not the problem, but the fact that it is grasped as a collection of things, not as historical practice, is. Marx and Engels’s critique of Feuerbach is, therefore, fundamentally different. As the first “Thesis on Feuerbach” states, Feuerbach’s materialism represents “things [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness . . . only in the form of the *object*, or of *contemplation*, but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively. . . . Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective activity*” (CW 5, 6). In the fifth “Thesis,” Marx writes that Feuerbach “does not conceive sensuousness as practical, human-sensuous activity” (ibid., 7). Bauer’s critique, on the other hand, is based on the conjuring of “lascivious images,” which are the creation of traditional Idealism.

The deeply rooted misconception of materiality is, according to Marx and Engels’s arguments about the division of labor in *The German Ideology*, a direct result of the detachment of mental labor from manual labor. The Idealist tradition has conventionally reflected this detachment by rejecting its Other as dirty or false. More specifically, Idealism has imagined matter as existing doubly: once as concrete but untrue and once as abstract but true, with the latter thought to pre-exist the former. That is,

underneath its profane side, material reality has a higher essence, an *a priori* nature. Bauer criticizes Feuerbach for his humanist/spiritualist notion of matter, but, as Marx and Engels demonstrate, Bauer's own concept of matter is that it is a *concept*: "First there exists the *concept* of matter, an abstraction, an idea, and this latter realises itself in actual nature. Word for word the Hegelian theory of the pre-existence of the creative categories" (ibid., 105). Thus, in Marx and Engels's view, Bauer is a monk who vigorously denounces, but is secretly enthralled with, the vulgar materiality of the masses. Harold Mah has aptly articulated the connection between Bauer's derogatory attitude toward matter, his elitist revulsion against the working people, and the division between mental and manual labor when he claims that Bauer equated sensuous activity directly with mechanical labor and physical toil. Hence, Bauer accused anyone who located agency in the working classes as engaged in the "deification of the masses."⁴⁸⁶

In its key principles, then, the critique of "II. Saint Max" remains consistent with the early Marx's critique of Hegel. Marx and Engels maintain that Bauer's Young Hegelian criticism, because it wants to eject sensuous practice from history, is a project of abstention and isolation. Bauer had defended himself against Marx and Engels's attack in *The Holy Family*, but his defense did not offer anything new; it merely reiterated the same idealist assertions about criticism being the sole "creative and productive principle" (quoted in *CW* 4, 107). Bauer is accused, along with Stirner, of being mere recyclers and "clumsy copier[s] of Hegel" (ibid., 170). They drive home this point by quoting Bauer who asserted steadfastly that "criticism *and* the critics . . . have guided and made history, that even their opponents and all the movements and agitations of the

⁴⁸⁶ Harold Mah, *The End of Philosophy, the Origin of "Ideology": Karl Marx and the Crisis of the Young Hegelians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 83.

present time are their creation, that it is they alone who hold *power in their hands*, because strength is in their consciousness, and . . . that only by the act of criticism is man freed and thereby men also, and man is *created*” (quoted in *ibid.*, 109).

If the tone and style of Marx and Engels’s critique appear personal and overly harsh at times, we must remember that this is how politico-intellectual polemics were written at the time and that similar arguments and similar attacks were advanced by everyone else involved. In the article discussed by Marx and Engels, for instance, Bauer had accused Hess of having copied from Hegel, which prompted Marx and Engels to turn the allegation around and count, in a three-line passage in Bauer’s essay, “not two doubtful Hegelian categories, as in the case of Hess, but a round dozen of ‘true, infinite, irresistible’ Hegelian categories” (115).⁴⁸⁷ As each party wanted to have the last word in the debate, all affirmed and reaffirmed their position vigorously and sometimes viciously. While in retrospect, the dispute appears at times to descend into trivialities, this is mostly an effect of our historical distance. In truth, it was through these intricate interchanges and confrontations that all those involved refined and clarified their positions. Marx and Engels, too, were forced to respond to criticism and hostile commentary.

Accordingly, Marx and Engels’s efforts to address their detractors display not only a good measure of condescension but also a profound vulnerability. In one passage, for example, the timbre turns from aggressive to defensive when Marx and Engels react to Bauer’s claim that “[w]hat Engels and Marx could *not yet* do, M. Hess has accomplished” (*CW* 4, 114) and exclaim that they could not have criticized Stirner “[f]or the sufficient reason that—Stirner’s book *had not yet appeared* when they wrote *Die*

⁴⁸⁷ The charge of plagiarism is used extensively by Marx and Engels. With more than a hint of sarcasm, Marx and Engels charge Bauer with having “performed the ‘hard work’ of quoting” (114) on multiple occasions.

heilige Familie” (ibid.). In “III. Saint Max,” this vulnerability gives way to a more focused theorization of the ideal effects of the division between mental and manual labor, and a positive theory of social transformation emerges in Marx and Engels’s confrontation with Stirner’s purely negative one. The outlines of this positive theory are contained in what has been called the first exposition of the principles of historical materialism in “I. Feuerbach.” The manner in which the methodological doctrines of Marx’s materialist science emerged from Marx and Engels’s separation from Young Hegelian philosophy has been established. The following three chapters will turn to a consideration of how the concept of the division between mental and manual labor allowed Marx and Engels to develop a theory of ideology.

This chapter has shown that the critique of philosophy *and* the critique of radical philosophy were important aspects of Marx’s thought before 1845. This means that insofar as *The German Ideology* is mainly a critique of Young Hegelian philosophy, it is intricately connected to several of the early works. Therefore, I have argued, it is necessary to qualify the claim that *The German Ideology* marks a fundamental break with the works that preceded it. My review of the editorial history of the manuscript of *The German Ideology* corroborates this argument because it demonstrates that the supposedly systematic doctrines of historical materialism, contained in “I. Feuerbach,” were neither as coherent as they are typically assumed to be nor the intended center of the work. *The German Ideology*, I have maintained, must thus be read not as the beginning of Marx’s mature period, which, incidentally, never returned to the question of method, but as one moment in Marx’s transition from critical philosophy to critical social theory. Reading the manuscript against the background of Marx and Engel’s life in exile allows us to see

that this transition as one that was occasioned more than anything by the specific circumstances in which Marx and Engels found themselves: namely the increasing geographical and intellectual distance from the Young Hegelians in Germany.

CHAPTER 5

“I. Feuerbach”: Marx and Engels’s Concept of Material and Revolutionary Practice

Having lost their faith in the Hegelian world of ideas, the German philosophers protest against the domination of thoughts, ideas, and concepts which, according to their opinion, i.e. according to *Hegel’s illusion*, have hitherto produced, determined and dominated the real world. They make their protest and expire. (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*)⁴⁸⁸

The significance of *The German Ideology* has traditionally been explained in terms of the central importance attributed to those sections of the text that are generally known as belonging to “I. Feuerbach: Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook.” In the words of MEGA editor Vladimir Viktorovič Adoratskij, *The German Ideology* is “of the highest theoretical, historical, and practical value” This, according to Adoratskij, is because “in none of their other early works do we find such a wide-ranging and comprehensive examination of the basic questions of dialectical materialism. The manuscript “I. Feuerbach,” which has unfortunately remained unfinished and was never fully elaborated, contains the first systematic exposition of their [Marx and Engels’s] historical-philosophical view of the economic developments of humankind.”⁴⁸⁹ In other words, the value of the entire manuscript is seen primarily as a function of the importance

⁴⁸⁸ *CW* 5, 24.

⁴⁸⁹ Vladimir Adoratskij, “Einleitung” to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, MEGA 1 (Moscow: Verlagsgenossenschaft ausländischer Arbeiter in der UdSSR), Part 1, Vol. 5 (ix-x); trans. mine.

of “I. Feuerbach” because it is seen as the original expression of the basic premises of Marx’s historical materialism. This assessment, while most recently subject to challenge,⁴⁹⁰ continues to govern the contemporary reception of the work.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that this first section of the text, pieced together by the editors of the 1932 publication, comprises the most quoted part of *The German Ideology*. In fact, several of what are today the most well-known statements by Marx stem from “I. Feuerbach.” These familiar statements include the doctrine that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas,” the claim that “consciousness can never be anything else but conscious being,” and the (in)famous assertion that “in all

⁴⁹⁰ As I have already explained, critical research into the origin of *The German Ideology* has revealed that it is no longer appropriate to treat the four fragments on Feuerbach and on the “Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook” as a *systematic* statement of the basic principles of Marx’s historical materialism. This conclusion is based on the fact that the fragments in question are of varying length, quality, and subject matter. While apparently intended by Marx and Engels eventually to be incorporated into an introduction, these passages were never integrated into a unified whole, and since some of the material was originally part of the discussion of Stirner, the four sections do not follow any particular logical order. Several of the passages are very short, almost axiomatic, and exhibit a noticeable lack of development. The heterogeneous character of these manuscripts, therefore, has been cited as evidence for the claim that it is impossible to maintain the conventional notion that “I. Feuerbach” is a coherent exposition of Marx’s materialist method.

A number of Marx/Engels scholars have attempted to follow up on this challenge by maintaining that traditional Marxist-Leninist doctrine was wrong to posit the internal coherence of the “chapter” on Feuerbach. In an effort to counter what are believed to be outdated strategico-political decisions, these scholars have emphasized the contradictions and ambiguities both within such works as the “Theses” and *The German Ideology* but also between them and the works of the late Marx. (For an example of a discussion of the “tensions” in *The German Ideology*, see Anthony Giddens’s discussion of “Marx’s scheme of social evolution” in the chapter “Society as Time-Traveller: Capitalism and World History,” *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995], 69-89.) With respect specifically to Marx’s engagement with the Young Hegelians, Falko Schmieder, for instance, claims that there is a fundamental inconsistency in Marx’s Feuerbach critique, as advanced in the “Theses” and *The German Ideology*. (See Falko Schmieder, “Für eine neue Lektüre des Feuerbachkritik der *Thesen über Feuerbach* und der *Deutschen Ideologie*,” *Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung*, Neue Folge 2006: Karl Marx und die Naturwissenschaften im 19. Jahrhundert [Berlin: Argument, 2006], 178-206.)

The new, MEGA© edition of *The German Ideology* (currently in work at the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften) represents the shift in the theoretical appropriation of the text. Volume I/5 emphasizes the provisional character of the manuscript material by omitting the editorial changes in the 1932 edition and by instead printing its individual parts as separate documents, in chronological order, and in their original form. In a preliminary publication of the text material that was produced in connection with Marx’s critique of Bauer, the *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch* 2003 aims to testify to “the fact that there was neither a plan made in the spring, nor in the autumn of 1845 for the publication of two volumes of ‘The German Ideology’” (Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Joseph Weydemeyer, *Die Deutsche Ideologie: Artikel, Druckvorlagen und Notizen zu I. Feuerbach and II. Sankt Bruno*, Inge Taubert et al. (eds.), *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch* 2003 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), 26.

ideology, men and their relations appear upside down as in a *camera obscura*.⁴⁹¹ These and other formulations have been recited countless times in the literature, often accompanied with lengthy discussions over whether or not the passages in question are deterministic and metaphysical and, if so, how this may be assessed and explained.

If it is true, as I have suggested, that the traditional reading of *The German Ideology* has unfairly privileged the four fragments about Feuerbach and the principles of the materialist approach to history, to the detriment of our understanding of the other, more intricate and extensive, parts of the work, it is also true that the prominence of this “introduction” in twentieth-century Marxist theory warrants a closer analysis both of the text(s) and of the theoretical discourse concerned with this part of the Brussels manuscripts. The following discussion will endorse the conventional interpretation that assumes that the four sections on Feuerbach and historical materialism a) do indeed occupy (not the most prominent but) *a* prominent place both in *The German Ideology* and in Marx’s *oeuvre* as a whole and b) contain a (not completely transparent but) basically logical and consistent exposition of Marx’s materialist method. However, I propose to offer a new perspective on the epistemological dimensions of Marx’s social theory. That is to say that I will shed light on Marx’s theory of knowledge, which, as I shall show in my analysis of the concept of ideology, is not metaphysical but practical-empirical and social: It is a class theory of consciousness.

While there is a general consensus regarding the importance of *The German Ideology*⁴⁹², there have also been some efforts to marginalize it. Since the rise of Critical

⁴⁹¹ *CW* 5, 59 and 36; hereafter cited parenthetically.

⁴⁹² The fact that *The German Ideology* marked the break between the early Marx and the mature Marx, that is, between the Young Hegelian Marx and the scientific Marx, or between a pre-Marxist Marx and a properly post-Hegelian and truly Marxist Marx, has been challenged by the humanist Marxists who have tended to posit an essential continuity between the early and the later works of Marx while emphasizing the subjectivist and philosophical aspects of his writings and deemphasizing specifically the mechanical and

Theory and cultural studies within the Western academic scene, the Marx of *The German Ideology* has variously been charged with promoting a reflection theory of knowledge, a vulgar materialism, and a positivistic empiricism supposedly at odds with the mature Marx's approach. These accusations amount to the claim that when he wrote *The German Ideology* Marx had not yet developed a nuanced and complex understanding of the relation between objective reality and knowing subject. In this vein, it has further been asserted that Marx eventually broke with his earlier, cruder materialism (in other words, that there is a sharp disconnect between his critique of political economy and the works prior to it) and even that particular passages in *The German Ideology*, specifically those mentioned above, might actually have been an expression not so much of Marx's views but rather Engels's, which are often argued to have been simple in contrast with Marx's.⁴⁹³ It is the purpose of this chapter to take up these challenges in a radical reinterpretation of Marx and Engels's theory of ideology through a close examination of "I. Feuerbach" and the "Preface."

The Critique of Religion and Its Limits

The well-known *Vorrede* was clearly intended as a summary of Marx and Engels's positions and should be treated as such. Incidentally, the "Preface" is also the only part of the manuscript written in Marx's hand, aside from corrections and changes.⁴⁹⁴ It consists

economistic moments in *The German Ideology*. A nuanced middle course is charted by Philip Kain in his *Marx's Method, Epistemology, and Humanism: A Study in the Development of His Thought*, Sovietica 48 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1986). While Kain reads *The German Ideology* "as an over-reaction [to the views expressed in the *1844 Manuscripts*] which had to be corrected in the *Grundrisse*" (5), he insists that the work was instrumental in Marx's break with metaphysics and allowed him to become a more sophisticated humanist. His reminder that "[s]cience and humanism are not opposed" (121) remains a valuable point of departure for the post-Althusserian study of Marx's thought.

⁴⁹³ For a more recent example of a rigid separation of Marx and Engels, to the discredit of the latter, see Tom Rockmore, *Marx After Marxism: The Philosophy of Karl Marx* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

⁴⁹⁴ Apart from these few pages and some marginal notes, the manuscript is exclusively in Engels's handwriting. The only other exception is the essay on Georg Kuhlmann in the second volume, which was

of two and a half pages, the last one and a half of which are crossed out. It seems that Marx produced this comical but to-the-point preface in Brussels between May and August of 1846 when the plan to publish the quarterly with Meyer and Rempel fell through. The “Preface” is a three-paragraph outline of Volume 1 that anticipates both the tone and the method which dominate the over 600 pages to follow. The first paragraph posits the *sine qua non* of the Young Hegelian ideology and its various shades in the work of Feuerbach, Bauer, and Stirner. The second paragraph announces the authors’ intention to negate this latest mutation of German Idealist philosophy and to explain it in terms of the economic conditions in Germany. The link between theoretical critique and the materialist method of approach is thus established at the outset as the authors proclaim to be able to explain their opponents’ views in terms of material conditions. Finally, the third paragraph is a kind of mock fairy tale that serves both as a parody of the Young Hegelians’ ideas and as a synopsis of the authors’ main argument.

In quasi-dialectical fashion, Marx and Engels begin by giving a reproduction of the thought of the Left Hegelians in order then to present their own objections as the antithesis and finally to present this negation as historically posited and thus overcome through reality. Thus, they soliloquize the Young Hegelian ideas about the role of criticism:

Hitherto men have always formed wrong ideas about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their relationships according to their ideas of God, of normal man, etc. The products of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations. Let us liberate them from their chimeras, the ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away. Let us revolt against this rule of concepts. Let us teach men, says one, to exchange these imaginations for thoughts which correspond to the essence of man; says another, how to take up a critical attitude

written by Moses Hess and copied by Joseph Weydemeyer.

to them; says the third, how to get them out of their heads; and existing reality will collapse. (*CW* 5, 23)

Next comes the rebuttal. Marx and Engels declare that the purpose of the discourse is to discuss and denounce the pseudo-materialist character of post-Hegelian philosophy:

These innocent and child-like fancies are the kernel of the modern Young-Hegelian philosophy, which not only is received by the German public with horror and awe, but is announced by our *philosophic heroes* with the solemn consciousness of its world-shattering danger and criminal ruthlessness. The first volume of the present publication has the aim of uncloaking these sheep, who take themselves and are taken for wolves; of showing that their bleating merely imitates in a philosophic form the conceptions of the German middle class; that the boasting of these philosophic commentators only mirrors the wretchedness of the real conditions in Germany. It is its aim to ridicule and discredit the philosophic struggle with the shadows of reality, which appeals to the dreamy and muddled German nation. (*Ibid.*, 23-24)

The last section of the “Preface” restates the authors’ objectives by way of an analogy, an invented folktale, which tells of the triumph of scientific knowledge over the idealist distortions of the critique of religion:

Once upon a time a valiant fellow had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed with the *idea of gravity*. If they were to get this notion out of their heads, say by avowing it to be a superstitious, a religious concept, they would be sublimely proof against any danger from water. His whole life long he fought against the illusion of gravity, of whose harmful consequences all statistics brought him new and manifold evidence. This valiant fellow was the type of the new revolutionary philosophers in Germany. (*Ibid.*, 24)

If there is no happily-ever-after here, it is because Marx and Engels are about to hand the Young Hegelians their “death sentence.”⁴⁹⁵ They maintain that just as any fool who believes that he is exempt from the law of gravity will perish as soon as he puts his ideas to the test, so is the end of ideology historically inevitable.⁴⁹⁶ What this implies is

⁴⁹⁵ *CW* 5, 18. This term is from a separate piece written by Marx and Engels in response to Bauer and published in *Gesellschaftsspiegel*. It was written in November of 1845 and published in January of 1846. In the *Collected Works*, it is titled “A Reply to Bruno Bauer’s Anti-Critique”; in the MEGA ② prepublication of *The German Ideology*, it is titled “Gegen Bruno Bauer” (Marx, Engels, and Weydemeyer. *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, 3-5).

⁴⁹⁶ The “end of ideology” concept has taken on a rather different coloration in conservative discourse that aims to portray liberal democracy and hence capitalism as the final stage of history. One obvious point of

that the fate of philosophy is bound up with the course of history, meaning, once the conditions that produced philosophy are overcome through revolutionary action, philosophy is overcome as well; the “science” of historical materialism is seen as bearing witness to this necessity. However, it is precisely this basic premise that has become the target of one of the main charges laid at the door of *The German Ideology*: If philosophical idealism is a function of a particular economic situation and will cease to exist with the abolition of class society, then *The German Ideology* itself must be regarded as a gratuitous attempt to end the war of “phrases against phrases,”⁴⁹⁷ a waste of energy, as it were. The critical question posed is why Marx and Engels would go to the trouble of proclaiming at length the certain death of something that has already been diagnosed with a terminal illness. What this critique misses, however, is that Marx and Engels did not in this commentary aim to do more than observe and theorize a real movement whose completion was not in sight then and, as it turns out, is still not in sight today.

reference in this connection is the end-of-ideology debate sparked by American sociologist Daniel Bell. See his *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Collier Books, 1962). The publication of the book was followed by an intense debate that foreshadowed the end-of-history discussion more recently (sparked in turn by Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History*); one collection of essays, for instance, devotes itself specifically to the discussion of Bell’s thesis that politics proper has ceased to exist: See Chaim I. Waxman (ed), *The End of Ideology Debate* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968). A comprehensive study of the historical context is Job L. Dittberner’s *The End of Ideology and American Social Thought: 1930-1960*, Studies in American History and Culture 1 (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1979). Finally, there is the more recent work by Leonidas Donskis titled *The End of Ideology & Utopia? Moral Imagination and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: P. Lang, 2000).

⁴⁹⁷ Such a negative assessment of the work is given by McLellan who claims that the work is “turgid.” He also says that “In *The German Ideology* he and Engels certainly spared no effort: their onslaught on ‘Saint Max’ as they called him equals in length and easily surpasses in tedium Stirner’s own book. There is the occasional flash of brilliance, but the (quite correct) portrayal of Stirner as the final product of the Young Hegelian school who carried to its logical extreme the subjective side of the Hegelian dialectic too often degenerates into pages of mere word-play and hair-splitting” (McLellan, *Karl Marx*, 134.) Isaiah Berlin seems to imply that “I. Feuerbach is the only worthwhile aspect of the work: “This, for the most part, confused, verbose and ponderous work, which deals with authors and views long dead and justly forgotten, contains in its lengthy introduction the most sustained, imaginative and impressive exposition of Marx’s theory of history” (Berlin, *Karl Marx*, 102).

The fact that *The German Ideology* is actually a discourse on another discourse, which was in many ways a discourse on yet another discourse (if the Young Hegelians are seen as commenting on Hegel), has led to the charge that the work is boring and without much substantive value.⁴⁹⁸ Certainly, inasmuch as this work does indeed linger, to a large extent, in the negative moment, it appears to engage in precisely the kind of quarrel that it claims to have left behind. However, Marx and Engels did not settle their accounts with post-Idealist philosophy overnight. If the process appears long and arduous in retrospect, it is because the process *was* long and arduous. This does not mean that it was superfluous or that tracing it can reveal nothing interesting. The significance of the work lies in the process itself: the process by which Marx performed his break with the Young Hegelians. Conceived as a prelude to a positive science of political economy,⁴⁹⁹ *The German Ideology* must be understood as a Marx's "work in progress."

In their attack on the Young Hegelians, Marx and Engels are exceedingly clear about the particular problem that has afflicted critical idealist philosophy. As the "Preface" demonstrates, the main target of *The German Ideology* is the view that freedom is an achievement of (the) mind. This view, according to Marx and Engels, is not radical; in fact, it is conservative, even reactionary, despite its self-ascriptions to the contrary. Because they were based on a fundamental failure to grasp reality as definite activity, as the historical and social activity of individuals, the Young Hegelian intellectual exertions were to Marx and Engels just that: intellectual exertions without relation to actually-existing struggles for freedom in the world. According to Marx and Engels, the Young

⁴⁹⁸ The expression also occurs on page 134. It is noteworthy that the expression is placed in quotation marks in the discussion of Stirner.

⁴⁹⁹ It was not only in hindsight that Marx saw this need to "settle accounts" with Hegelian philosophy; rather, Marx entered the project with the full intent of moving on to more constructive work (see also Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx: A Life* [New York: Norton, 2000], 91-92).

Hegelians have not in fact successfully secularized and thereby supplanted traditional philosophy; in reality, they have merely produced a new version of the old metaphysics. Thinking that they have left behind Hegel's system in the process of going through it, these critical disciples did not go far enough and ended up falling behind Hegel.⁵⁰⁰ Marx and Engels's explicit goal is to show that the "radical" revisions of idealist philosophy lack the most important elements of a politically radical social theory: a concept of concrete practice, an understanding of historical movement resulting from the conflict between material interests, and a sense of the irreducibly social nature of human life.

Marx and Engels's point of departure is the concept of alienation.⁵⁰¹ Taking issue with the Young Hegelian notion that the Christian faith in a personal God is the basic form of human alienation and responsible for the ills of present society, Marx and Engels offer a different interpretation of the problem of *Veräußerung/Entäußerung/Entfremdung*. As is well known, Marx's initial advance over Hegel (articulated already in the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts") consisted in his realization that "objectification" was not the product of the unfolding of Spirit in the world but of economic conditions and relations. Therefore, Marx and Engels argue that unless alienation is grasped in its material reality there can be no progress beyond the critique of metaphysics. The critique of theology in Hegel had given way to the critique of religion in the Young Hegelians. However, this philosophical approach cannot address the real sources of social dislocation. In "I. Feuerbach," Marx and Engels express this argument

⁵⁰⁰ Marx and Engels seem to distance themselves from the very project of "going beyond" Hegel. Accepting the principle of dialectics but discarding its idealist interpretation, Marx and Engels no longer view Hegel as the ultimate reference point as was still the case with Bauer for instance.

⁵⁰¹ For an introduction to Marx's concept of alienation, see Bertell Ollman's classic work *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971. See also my discussion "Marxism and the Concept of Alienation – Observations and Comments," in *Entfremdung*, Bernstein Preisaufgabe 2008, forthcoming in 2009 (Bonn: Bernstein Verlag, 2009).

as follows: “The entire body of German philosophical criticism from Strauß to Stirner is confined to criticism of *religious* conceptions” (*CW* 5, 29). Further, a crossed-out passage that follows this sentence explains that “[r]eligion was continually regarded and treated [by the Young Hegelians] as the arch-enemy, as the ultimate cause of all relations repugnant to these philosophers” (*ibid.*). Believing themselves to be the “absolute redeemers of the world from all evil” (*ibid.*), these Young Hegelian critics, according to Marx and Engels, put too much stock in the negation of religious concepts, claiming that it was the only and final task of theory. But the reduction of alienation to the problem of religion is doomed to remain ineffective, and any “pious” wish to the contrary is merely the symptom of a fundamental, structurally produced, intellectual naïveté that treats the world as a set of doctrines.

The “Preface” establishes up front that ideology is the critical study of alienation *qua* religion. If it is not immediately obvious to the reader that Marx and Engels view the philosophical idealism inherent in the critique of religion as *the* central characteristic of ideology, it is only because the three paragraphs that make up the preface do not contain the term “ideology.” However, the direct link between idealism and ideology becomes clear in a passage that is crossed-out in the manuscript. In this passage, Marx and Engels continue on to say, that “There is no specific difference between German idealism and the ideology of other nations. The latter too regards the world as dominated by ideas, ideas and concepts as the determining principles, and certain notions as the mystery of the material world accessible to the philosophers” (*CW* 5, 23). But not only are German

ideologists in principle no different from ideologists everywhere else⁵⁰², they are also not fundamentally different from Hegel, whose “rebellious disciples” (ibid., 24) they are.

Marx and Engels include Hegel in their critique of German philosophy. They maintain that he “completed positive idealism . . . [and] turned the whole material world into a world of ideas and the whole of history into a history of ideas” (*CW* 5, 24). The Young Hegelians, “[r]oused from their world of fancy . . . protest against the world of ideas to which they . . . [oppose] the conception of the real, material.”⁵⁰³ But rather than theorize the real and material, they continue to be preoccupied with the critique of ideas:

All the German philosophical critics assert that the real world of men has hitherto been dominated and determined by ideas, images, concepts, and that the real world is a product of the world of ideas. This has been the case up to now, but it ought to be changed. They differ from each other in the manner in which they intend to deliver mankind, which in their opinion is groaning under the weight of its own fixed ideas; they differ in respect of what they proclaim to be fixed ideas; they agree in their belief in the hegemony of ideas, they agree in the belief that the action of their critical reason must bring about the destruction of the existing order of things: whether they consider their isolated rational activity sufficient or want to conquer universal consciousness. (Ibid.)

However, Marx and Engels were not primarily concerned with Idealism pure and simple. They did not write about Kant, Fichte, or Schelling. They took to task their

⁵⁰² Further on in the text, of course, Marx and Engels claim that German ideology is peculiar and that this peculiarity can be accounted for by way of the peculiar economic conditions in Germany. This apparent contradiction may be the reason why this passage was crossed out later on. In a marginal note to the rough copy of the “Introduction,” Marx notes: “The importance of phrases in Germany” (*CW* 5, 38). There are also various other passages in *The German Ideology* where Marx and Engels argue that the German ideology is worse than any other because the German philosophers have no notion of real material history at all:

[T]he Germans have never . . . had an *earthly* basis for history and consequently never a historian. The French and the English, even if they have conceived the relation of this fact with so-called history only in an extremely one-sided fashion, especially since they remained in the toils of political ideology, have nevertheless made the first attempts to give the writing of history a materialistic basis by being the first to write histories of civil society, of commerce and industry. (Ibid., 55)

In yet another passage, they explain,

While the French and the English at least stick to the political illusion, which is after all closer to reality, the Germans move in the realm of the ‘pure spirit,’ and make religious illusion the driving force of history. The Hegelian philosophy of history is the last consequence, reduced to its “clearest expression,” of all this German historiography for which it is not a question of real, nor even of political, interests, but of pure thoughts. (Ibid.)

⁵⁰³ These gaps are in the manuscript.

Young Hegelian contemporaries because they themselves shared their interest in grounding philosophy in historical reality and in uncovering the radical kernel of Hegel's system. Marx and Engels's critique was inspired by a concern to think through and discuss the specifics of a properly materialist approach to history and to distinguish their own materialism from other forms of secularist theory that had not succeeded in substituting the idealist abstractions with an empirically oriented human science.⁵⁰⁴ What made the Young Hegelian theories inadequate to the task was their proponents' conviction that (a) everyone, except for themselves, was under the sway of false consciousness, (b) this false consciousness was responsible for people's misery, and (c) only their "critical criticism" could liberate humankind. The new idealism, then, was different from traditional Idealism. The Young Hegelians, unlike previous generations of idealist thinkers, but like the French ideologists, defined their goal as critics clearly and unambiguously as the project of correcting society's false views.

Their differences notwithstanding, Feuerbach, Stirner, Bauer, Marx, Engels, as well as many other leftist thinkers were working toward a similar objective – to develop a radically this-worldly approach to social change. But, having reached divergent conclusions, they engaged in a bitter fight over exactly how this was to be done and,

⁵⁰⁴ I use the term "human science" in the broadest sense possible to refer to the study of human life. Insofar as we can distinguish a hermeneutic approach and a method-driven approach, it is clear that Marx's materialism is to be located near the latter pole, even though it is not necessary to assume that Marx would have accepted the notion that the science of history should be modeled entirely after the science of nature. After all, he notes in a crossed-out section in "I. Feuerbach" that while history is the only science, there are two mutually dependent but distinct forms: "We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist" (*CW* 5, 28).

To say that the science of nature and the science of society are interrelated is not to say, however, that the "investigation and description of a process of historical development involves procedures which are akin to definite procedures familiar to mathematicians and physicists," which is the view characteristically ascribed to Engels (Johannes Witt-Hansen, *Historical Materialism: The Method, the Theories, Exposition and Critique*, Vol. 1 [New York: Humanities Press, 1960], 134). Whether or not this is an accurate reflection of Engels's standpoint cannot be discussed here.

more specifically, how the radical aspects of Idealist philosophy could be salvaged and the conservative aspects be discarded. What set Marx and Engels's position apart was their insight that even Stirner's most thoroughgoing critique of Idealism relied on the notion that people's lives are ruled by a spiritual realm. They hear Stirner's call to his contemporaries to commit to a materialist consciousness and thereby inaugurate a materialist age. However, they recognize in this call Hegel's idea of the Spirit that materializes itself at the end of history. They argue that the Young Hegelians are wrong to assume that spirit/s has/have *ever* governed practical reality. By doing so, Marx and Engels effectively brought the critique of philosophical idealism to an end. At the same time, they went further yet, showing that this assumption of the rule of ideas is itself a product of an underlying economic reality.

In light of these remarks, it is necessary to revise the allegation that in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels promoted the positivist Enlightenment view that irrational thinking needed to be removed from people's minds and substituted with reason. Such a reading turns the Marxian ideology concept on its head by attributing to Marx and Engels precisely the kind of intellectualism that they were writing against: namely the untenable optimism that the critical destruction of idealist myths will bring about the dissolution of the existing society. It was precisely Marx and Engels's intention to show that socio-economic facts cannot simply be wished away through a process of demystification or *Aufklärung*. In fact, Marx and Engels explicitly attack the eighteenth-century concept of the "priestly lie" in *The German Ideology*. Ascribing a kind of *Bildungsphilosophie* to Marx and Engels misses the crucial fact that they made an open break with all theoretical approaches that tried to explain domination and oppression by

resorting to the concept of prejudice, i.e. ignorance and deception, rather than by identifying their historico-material determinants and studying the concrete possibilities and locations of actual revolutionary movements.

The “Preface” to *The German Ideology* gives us a summary of the chief characteristics of ideology, the most important of which is that it is not scientific. The Young Hegelians strove to reach a vantage point without “presuppositions” but managed merely to obscure and forget their own. In stark contrast, Marx and Engels propose a notion of science that is not anti-political. In fact, they argue that ideology is a would-be science insofar as the Young Hegelians are would-be radicals.⁵⁰⁵ It is apparent from the outset that historical materialism was to replace ideology. Humanism, despite its avowed concern for this-worldly things, operates on the basis of principles that eschew and even oppose actual social practice. Marx and Engels, however, conceived their theory as a *science of revolutionary action in history*. Before this background, it becomes clear why Marx’s materialist science cannot be called an ideology. Inasmuch as Marx’s approach is explicitly directed against all manner of idealist fallacies, the claim that Marx was an ideologist would surely require a very different understanding of ideology, likely a Leninist one⁵⁰⁶, and would otherwise be difficult to uphold unless, of course, Marx could be shown to have committed the very idealist fallacies that he wanted to expose.⁵⁰⁷ However, if Marx’s ideology critique is to be grasped in its original meaning and intent, it is crucial that we take seriously Marx’s unambiguous formulation that his theoretical

⁵⁰⁵ This term has been used by others, including Tommie Shelby in “Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory,” *The Philosophical Forum* 34 (Summer 2003): 153-188.

⁵⁰⁶ See the related discussion in my introduction.

⁵⁰⁷ An example of such a charge is Helmut Fleischer’s claim that “[c]ommunism [for Marx and Engels] is not only a prediction; it is also an aim. It is, though Marx and Engels denied it, an ideal, bearing the stamp of humanist values . . . a ‘categorical imperative.’” Fleischer also argues that this idea was dropped in the later Marx (*Marxism and History*, trans. by Eric Mosbacher [London: Allen Lane, 1973]), 93.

abstractions were developed “in contradistinction to ideology” (*CW* 5, 37). G.A. Cohen makes this basic point in his *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*, where he says that “science is not ideology, since it is a defining property of ideology that it is unscientific.”⁵⁰⁸

As I suggested, the contemporary rejection of the science-ideology distinction seems to be based on the assumption that any claim to scientificity must position itself as outside of politics. This is clearly not the case here. Marx and Engels conceive of the science of history as fully political. For this reason, it is also misguided to maintain that Marx and Engels performed what is often referred to as “the ideological gesture *par excellence*,” the ideological being defined along postmodern lines as the refusal to acknowledge the situatedness of all knowledge, especially one’s own. It is true that they attribute ideology to “the other,” but, as I pointed out already, they do not try to occupy an Archimedean standpoint outside of all standpoints. The crux of this problem is that Marx and Engels did not contest the particularity of every “manner of approach,” but they also did not consider every manner of approach equal, as the relativist does. They did not, after all, agree with Stirner that “Truths are [nothing but] phrases, ways of speaking, words.”⁵⁰⁹ Therefore, one might say that, while there is no outside of society for Marx and Engels, there most certainly is an outside of ideology. This is simply because the ideological instance is a very *particular* by-product of the social order. Science is another by-product, but it can take the standpoint of the social order in order to expose its ideological instances.

Insofar as the theory of ideology is in fact a theory of distortion, it is a theory of a *particular* set of inversions that afflict only a small minority of people in class society. It

⁵⁰⁸ G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001 [1978]), 46.

⁵⁰⁹ Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 307.

is a subterfuge that thrives in the space of the professional thinker and consists precisely in the disconnection of the ideological effects from their social origin. Marx and Engels summarize the ideological “trick” as consisting of three operations: “No. 1. One must separate the ideas of those ruling for empirical reasons, under empirical conditions and as corporeal individuals, from these rulers, and thus recognise the rule of ideas or illusions in history” (*CW* 5, 62). That is, the first maneuver of ideology is to posit ruling ideas, i.e. ideas as ruling independently from the rulers. The second maneuver consists in finding relations between ideas only, rather than between ideas and social classes, and ascribing to these imagined relations a historical progression: “No. 2. One must bring an order into this rule of ideas, prove a mystical connection among the successive ruling ideas, which is managed by regarding them as ‘forms of self-determination of the concept’” (*ibid.*). Not the underlying empirical connections are grasped as the cause of ideal connections; instead, a cosmic first cause is invented as the ultimate origin of the “history of ideas.”

Finally, the third method, by which ideology upholds the notion of the dominance of ideas, is by postulating either that spirit *is* a material subject or that the “representatives” of the ideal realm, the philosophers, lord over the earthly world too: “No. 3. To remove the mystical appearance of this ‘self-determining concept’ it is changed into a person – ‘self-consciousness’” (*ibid.*). Here, Marx has primarily Feuerbach and Stirner in mind. Alternatively, “to appear thoroughly materialistic, [the Concept is turned] into a series of persons, who represent the ‘concept’ in history, into the ‘thinkers,’ the ‘philosophers,’ the ideologists, who again are understood as the manufacturers of history, as the ‘council of guardians,’ as the rulers” (*ibid.*). The appearance of a materialistic approach is then merely a farce: “Thus the whole body of

materialistic elements has been eliminated from history and now full rein can be given to the speculative steed” (ibid.). Marx and Engels’s critique of ideology, therefore, is a critique of the critique of ideas.

Historical materialism, accordingly, must proceed in the opposite direction: by relating the ideas of the ruling class to the material situation of that class, by further relating the connections among those ideas to the interconnectedness of the underlying material reality, and by refusing both to personify abstractions and view actual people as embodiments, i.e. examples, of abstract principles. The recovery of the relation between economic reality and ideological distortions is the subject of “I. Feuerbach,” a close examination of which will demonstrate that the Marxian *Ideologiekritik* is a specific case of the materialist method, one that links the concept of alienation and the concept of the division between mental and manual labor.

Beyond the Reflex Problem: Alienation and the Division of Labor

As noted, “I. Feuerbach” is generally regarded as “the most important chapter of *The German Ideology*” (CW 5, 587, n7). However, for this reason, “I. Feuerbach” has been treated as an all-purpose well of quotable statements and doctrines. Unfortunately, too many discussions of the text sections in “I. Feuerbach” have as thus contributed to the confusion over Marx’s ideology concept by extracting certain paragraphs and sentences and presenting them in isolation from the rest of the text to support all different kinds of arguments about Marx. In order to correct the misperceptions resulting from this eclecticism, we must consider the manuscript in its entirety and analyze in particular the relations between the various terms used by Marx and Engels. This will allow us to get a

clear sense of the ways in which “ideology,” “idealism,” “philosophy,” “consciousness,” “ideas,” and similar concepts are connected to, and yet different from, each other.

“I. Feuerbach” is subtitled “Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlooks” and immediately proceeds to discredit the revolutionary pretensions of the Young Hegelian philosophers. Marx and Engels begin by using irony to suggest that the ostensible epic proportions of the latest philosophical projects were in reality trivial affairs: “According to German ideologists, Germany has in the last few years gone through an unparalleled revolution. The decomposition of the Hegelian system, which began with Strauß, has developed into a universal ferment into which all the ‘powers of the past’ are swept. . . It was a revolution beside which the French Revolution was child’s play” (*CW* 5, 27). The “intellectual heroes,” who accomplished all this “in the realm of pure thought” (*ibid.*) Marx and Engels suggest fairly explicitly here that Left Hegelian criticism was not the earth-shattering event that its protagonists believed it to be.

Also immediately, they emphasize the lack of economic development in Germany, arguing that philosophical discourse was kept alive precisely because of a dearth of revolutionary activity. The Young Hegelians claim to have put an end to philosophical Idealism, but, in reality, they have only created new idealisms in the process. Thus, Marx and Engels comment satirically, “Certainly it is an interesting event we are dealing with: the putrescence of the absolute spirit. When the last spark of its life had failed, the various components of this *caput mortuum* began to decompose, entered into new combinations and formed new substances” (*CW* 5, 27). Further juxtaposing economic and philosophical activity, Marx and Engels portray the Young Hegelians as philosophical capitalists when they say, “The industrialists of philosophy, who till then

had lived on the exploitation of the absolute spirit, now seized upon the new combinations. Each with all possible zeal set about retailing his apportioned share. This was bound to give rise to competition, which, to start with, was carried on in moderately civil and staid fashion” (ibid.).

Likely referring to the critics after Feuerbach, Marx and Engels claim further that their work has been less sophisticated than that of those whom they criticize. They also set out their argument that Young Hegelian criticism has insulated itself from world events. Thus, they state, “Later, when the German market was glutted, and the commodity in spite of all efforts was not favourably received in the world market, the business was spoiled in the usual German manner by cheap and spurious production, deterioration in quality, adulteration of the raw materials” (*CW* 5, 27). The lack of relevance of the latest German criticism for world history is starkly contrasted with the Young Hegelians’ assessment of their theoretical significance: “The competition turned into a bitter struggle, which is now being extolled and interpreted to us as an upheaval of world significance, the begetter of the most prodigious results and achievements” (ibid.). Thus poking fun at what they claim are delusions of grandeur, Marx and Engels hand the Young Hegelians the verdict of being outdated and provincial, i.e. German.

As émigrés in Brussels, Marx and Engels are looking from the outside in, and this situation allows them to see the peculiar and peripheral nature (“the pettiness, the parochial narrowness”) of the Young Hegelian debates. Hence, they declare, “If we wish to rate at its true value this philosophic charlatanry, . . . of this whole Young-Hegelian movement and in particular the tragicomic contrast between the illusions of these heroes about their achievements and the actual achievements themselves, we must look at the

whole spectacle from a standpoint beyond the frontiers of Germany” (ibid., 28). This perspective from outside the borders of Germany has allowed them, Marx and Engels maintain (probably correctly), to discern the different ways in which The Young Hegelians have only modified, rather than overcome, Hegel’s metaphysical categories: “German criticism has, right up to its latest efforts, never left the realm of philosophy. It by no means examined its general philosophic premises. . . . This dependence on Hegel is the reason why not one of these modern critics has even attempted a comprehensive criticism of the Hegelian system, however much each professes to have advanced beyond Hegel” (*CW* 5, 28-9). In other words, the Young Hegelians’ claims to have secularized Hegel’s categories are not matched by the content of their work; their proclamations were polemical only. That this judgment is not fair has been suggested in the previous chapters.

However, the central argument that Marx and Engels make in *The German Ideology* is valid. Even as they tried to secularize Hegel’s categories, the Young Hegelians remained preoccupied with “phrases.” This is why the German critique of religion has never given way to a study of the struggle against the “real chains”: “The entire body of German philosophical criticism from Strauß to Stirner is confined to criticism of *religious* conceptions” (*CW* 5, 29). The expansion of the concept of religion did not change the principles on which the Young Hegelian criticism was based: “The critics started from real religion and theology proper. What religious consciousness and religious conception are was subsequently defined in various ways. The advance consisted in including the allegedly dominant metaphysical, political, juridical, moral and other conceptions under the category of religious or theological conceptions” (ibid.). In

the process, however, the Young Hegelians simply *assumed* that religious beliefs controlled the lives and actions of most people: “The dominance of religion was presupposed” (ibid.). More than that, they also *assumed* that institutions, social structures and progresses, as well as everyday practices were in existence because of certain religious beliefs: “Gradually every dominant relationship was declared to be a religious relationship and transformed into a cult, a cult of law, a cult of the state, etc. It was throughout merely a question of dogma and belief in dogmas. The world was sanctified to an ever-increasing extent till at last the venerable Saint Max was able to canonize it *en bloc* and thus dispose of it once and for all” (ibid.). Marx and Engels’s critique of ideology is therefore a critique of the critique of religious ideas.

The consequence of the Young Hegelians’ failure to put the critique of religion to rest is, according to Marx and Engels, theoretical and political conservatism. To begin with, the assumption that people in general hold illusory ideas about their world is presumptuous. More importantly, however, the critique of religion can only encourage people to give up their false ideas for correct ideas. It can only chastise them for not adjusting their own notions to those of radical philosophy. This means that the Young Hegelians cannot understand what people actually *do*, as opposed to what they think. It also means that they imagine themselves as superior humans who, simply put, think superior thoughts, true thoughts. Finally, it means that they cannot move from “critical” philosophy to a revolutionary science. The following well-known passage articulates these points very clearly.

The Old Hegelians had *understood* everything as soon as it was reduced to a Hegelian logical category. The Young Hegelians *criticized* everything by ascribing religious conceptions to it or by declaring that it is a theological matter. The Young Hegelians are in agreement with the Old Hegelians in their belief in

the rule of religion, of concepts, of a universal principle in the existing world. Except that the one party attacks this rule as usurpation, while the other extols as legitimate.

Since the Young Hegelians consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men (just as the Old Hegelians declare them the true bonds of human society), it is evident that the Young Hegelians have to fight only against these illusions of consciousness. Since, according to their fantasy, limitations are the products of their consciousness, the Young Hegelians logically put to men the moral postulate of exchanging their present consciousness for human, critical or egoistic consciousness, and thus of removing their limitations. This demand to change consciousness amounts to a demand to interpret the existing world in a different way, i.e., to recognize it by means of a different interpretation. The Young-Hegelian ideologists, in spite of their allegedly “world-shattering” phrases, are the staunchest conservatives. The most recent of them have found the correct expression for their activity when they declare they are only fighting against “*phrases*.” They forget, however, that they themselves are opposing nothing but phrases to these phrases, and that they are in no way combating the real existing world when they are combating solely the phrases of this world. (*CW* 5, 29-30)

In the manner of Don Quixote, Feuerbach, Bauer, Stirner, Szeliga, and the rest are caught in the world of books, unable to take note of “the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity” (*ibid.*, 31). This latter premise, which can be “verified in a purely empirical way” (*ibid.*) is “[t]he first premise of all human history [...] . . . the existence of living human individuals” (*ibid.*). The implication here is, of course, that due to the lack of revolutionary fervor in Germany, the German *Bürger* could still close his eyes to the social contradictions surrounding him, which were eventually going to erupt in 1848.

Having thus laid out their chief contentions *vis-à-vis* the Young Hegelians, Marx and Engels proceed to present the principles of their materialist approach to history, arguing that the concept of the division of labor must play a crucial role. If, as historical science realizes, and ideology does not realize, the changing relation between human

beings and nature is the “first fact to be established,” then what makes humans human is not primarily that they have minds and can think but rather that they engage in actions by which they *produce* their own livelihood. Marx and Engels state, “Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence. . . . By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life” (*CW* 5, 31-2). One might argue that the production of the means of subsistence *requires* consciousness. However, Marx and Engels conceive of production primarily as a material process, which, furthermore, is a whole way of life: “This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part” (ibid.).

To say, then, that consciousness is secondary to human nature is simply to say that a mode of production (which contains, of course, practical consciousness) is primary. This amounts to the dictum that production determines people, not consciousness: “As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. Hence what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production” (ibid.). But there is not just one mode of production; there are several. Modes of production are stages of development, each of which is the result of a particular state of the forces of production and the mode of intercourse (or what Marx and Engels later called the relations of production). The division of labor is an aspect of the form of intercourse and therefore a

central component of the economic structure of society, specifically class⁵¹⁰. As Robert Tucker says, “[c]lass conflict, the theory of which he [Marx] also develops here [in *The German Ideology*] for the first time, emerges as the decisive expression of the antagonism inherent in every form of the division of labor”⁵¹¹. Marx and Engels elaborate that the historical types of the division of labor (separation of agricultural from industrial and commercial labor, which also corresponds to the separation of town and country, and of industrial labor from commercial labor) correspond to different types of property relations (ibid., 32).⁵¹² They demonstrate in this discussion not only that the division of labor is one of the root causes of alienation⁵¹³ but moreover that the concept of alienation

⁵¹⁰ The traditional reception of the division of labor in Marx is that *The German Ideology* (specifically, of course, “I. Feuerbach”) massively overrates its historical importance. Scholars and critics have argued that Marx wrongly views it as the sole motor of history even though he does not even have a clearly delineated notion of it. Ali Rattansi, for example, argues that Marx *confuses* the division of labor with class:

The assimilation of class to the division of labour now independently performs the discursive function which had previously been accomplished by combining this form of reductionism with an essentialist anthropology. In an important sense the notion of division of labour replaces ‘alienation’: in the process, . . . Marx expands the concept to the point where it becomes synonymous with almost all divisions of social interest whether in capitalist or pre-capitalist social formations. (*Marx and the Division of Labour*, Contemporary Social Theory [London: The MacMillan Press, 1982], 77.)

Further, Rattansi asserts,

It is possible to observe . . . a quite remarkable extension in Marx’s usage of ‘division of labour’ and he places upon the notion a heavy explanatory and descriptive burden which threatens to strip it of any distinctive meaning. Almost any and every structural division, institutional separation and conflict of social or individual interest is either reduced to or seen as an aspect of the ‘division of labour.’ The central underlying principle here is, of course, the conflation between *class* and the division of labour – a direct legacy from the *1844 Manuscripts*” (ibid., 80).

Rattansi is eager to show that the mature Marx no longer believed in the importance of the abolition of labor in socialism, an argument that cannot be discussed here. Suffice it to say that the division between mental and manual labor is clearly intertwined with class and that the abolition of class must necessarily coincide with the abolition of the class division between mental and manual labor.

⁵¹¹ Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, 187.

⁵¹² They consider tribal property (with its limited social structure based on familial hierarchy), ancient communal and state property (with early private property, a class structure based on the citizen—slave division, and an embryonic proletariat), and feudal or estate property (with a class structure based on both the landowner/nobility—serf division and the capital-owning craftsman—journeyman division). In a later section of the text, they finish this discussion by describing the last form of property, bourgeois private property.

⁵¹³ In the 20th century, sociologist Emile Durkheim was to deny this claim and argue instead that the division of labor is a guarantor of social integration. According to Durkheim, social harmony in industrialized societies depends on, and is secured, by the division of labor. He calls this “organic solidarity,” as opposed to “mechanical solidarity” in ‘primitive’ societies: “[T]he rule which orders us to specialize . . . is necessary for the cohesion of societies. . . . Higher societies can maintain themselves in equilibrium only if labor is divided” (*The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. by George Simpson [New York: The Free Press, 1964 (1933)], 397.)

is made more specific in the concept of the division of labor.⁵¹⁴ Robert Tucker gives credence to this interpretation, arguing that “If alienation was the general historical condition of man for original Marxism, division of labour is the general condition for mature Marxism.”⁵¹⁵ In other words, the shift towards increased clarity can be read as a manifestation of the “break” in Marx’s thinking.

However, since the 1970’s, Marx’s shift towards more explicitly economic categories has not been interpreted favorably – mostly because “I. Feuerbach” is marked by strong affirmations of the derivative nature of all things non-economic. Unfortunately, parts of the respective sections have in the past been twisted to fit a certain hostile perspective. Bits and pieces have been picked out for extensive debate, notably the notorious *camera obscura* metaphor and the statements about “ideological reflexes” having “no history.” On the basis of the postmodern assumption that everything is ideological, Marx has been charged with claiming that all cultural and symbolic practices are nothing but ineffectual “echoes” of material determinations, “inversions” of the real-life process.⁵¹⁶ There has been widespread rejection of this so-called “vulgar Marxism”

⁵¹⁴ For a set of different perspectives on this issue, see André Grosz’s preface in the collection titled *Division of Labour: The Labour Process and Class-Struggle in Modern Capitalism* (Marxist Theory and Contemporary Capitalism [Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978]). There, Grosz states, “The capitalist division of labour is the source of all alienation” (vii). The end of alienation, according to this interpretation of Marx, is squarely rooted in the labour process itself: “[T]he emancipation of the working class, its power, begins through the struggle to recover its physical, psychic, intellectual and cultural integrity at work, that is to say in the struggle to impose the power of self-determination of the labour process” (x).

Bertell Ollman captures Marx’s ideas about the alienating effects of the division of labor very aptly when he says,

As the means by which his productive life is organized, a disinterested means outside his control, the division of labor towers over each individual as an inhuman master. Unless he chooses to starve, man cannot escape from the single occupation in which he is caught. Only the constant repetition of his productive task earns for him from others who are similarly bound the products he needs to live. Those of his powers which require other activities for their realization become atrophied. And even the single activity which is his preserve does not fulfill all the powers that are engaged, and cannot, because it is owned by someone else. (*Alienation*, 161)

⁵¹⁵ Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth*, 186.

⁵¹⁶ However, as many defenders of Marx have also pointed out, this dualist hierarchy belongs more to the materialism propagated by the theorists of the Second International, such as Plekhanov. Far less [missing word here?] commentators have noted that even Plekhanov’s approach may not have been as simplistic as

that apparently completely denigrates the role of ideas as ephemeral and ascribes to them not only a secondary ontological status but also a necessarily mystificatory character.⁵¹⁷

The problem, as I hope to show, is that this critique largely misses its target because it misses the theory of the division of labor in *The German Ideology*. This is to say that, in order to read the relevant passages correctly, it is necessary that we understand the importance of the division of labor for the Marxian critique of ideology.⁵¹⁸ Even more specifically, I argue that only a sense of the division between mental and manual labor will provide us with the tools to comprehend consciousness the way Marx and Engels understood it in *The German Ideology*: as an element of the material organization of society at a given historical moment. Once our reading of Marx is informed by a clear notion of consciousness as contingent on the class relations that govern a particular society, it becomes apparent that Marx and Engels have something very definite in mind when they speak of ideology: Far from thinking of ideas in an abstract, all-encompassing sense, Marx and Engels treat *consciousness as a historical and social phenomenon, as the product of mental labor*.

When Marx and Engels posit that empirical science overcomes deceptive appearances by attending to social reality as it actually is, not as people like to think it is,

it is often made out to be. Nonetheless, it can be established that Plekhanov contributed to the conflation of ideology theory and philosophical materialism. For instance, in *The Materialist Conception of History* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), he states, “*The History of ideologies is to a large extent to be explained by the rise, modification and breakdown of associations of ideas under the influence of the rise, modification and breakdown of definite combinations of social forces*” (44).

⁵¹⁷ While the theoretical neglect of the superstructure can certainly be viewed as problematic, I tend to agree with Gregor McLennan who has said that the charge of “vulgar Marxism” is an “all-purpose charge which is of no real use in advancing discussion” (in Betty Matthews (ed.), *Marx: A Hundred Years On* [London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1983], 143).

⁵¹⁸ This approach is rather different from that presented by Graham C. Kinloch, for example, who argues that “ideology represents differential responses to social change, in particular to the increasing division of labor” (*Ideology and Contemporary Sociological Theory* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981], 32). He distinguishes between conservative, liberal, and radical sociology/ideology depending on their position toward modernization, that is, the historical rise of democracy, and, more specifically, industrialization, the proletariat, and the general division of labor.

they distinguish between *Schein* und *Sein*; however, the concept of ideology in *The German Ideology* is *not* the same as Marx's later notion of the fetish. To be sure, "ideology" might be considered a kind of "phenomenal form" just as the commodity fetish, the price form, and the wage form, in the sense that they generate false appearances embedded in the very fabric of social reality. I do not wish to dispute the importance of such a theory, as post-Marxism would have it.⁵¹⁹ But it is crucial for our understanding of Marx's ideology concept to separate these two ideas. After all, "ideology" belongs to a distinct moment in Marx's thinking when the notion that people might be systematically deceived by the character of particular material realities was not an compelling. In *The German Ideology*, distortion affects the thinker. By contrast, distortion, in the first volume of *Capital*, and particularly the first chapter of the first volume of *Capital*, affects the worker who stands mystified before the value of things (confounded by the social hieroglyph that is the price, and unaware that exchange value, on average, expresses labor time); who is puzzled by the fact that even though she and her employer are exchanging equivalents (labor power for a daily, weekly, or monthly wage), the capitalist accumulates surplus while she can only ever sustain her physical existence; and who, as a constant seller and buyer of commodities, sees nothing but quantitative values relating to each other in different proportions (and hence cannot see the social relations that structure the process of production).

These are two very different approaches to the problem of distortion. Whether the "mature" Marx's claim of the inherent opacity of reality was in fact an immature return back to Hegel and his essence-appearance distinction cannot be discussed here.⁵²⁰ Nor is

⁵¹⁹ See the nonchalant rejection of the distinction between deep reality and surface appearances in Thomas Docherty's *After Theory: Postmodernism/Postmarxism* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁵²⁰ This, of course, is Althusser's argument and the reason for his rejection of concept of fetishism. He follows here Lenin who said in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (New York: International Publishers,

it useful to explain away the discrepancy by maintaining that the concept of ideology *developed into* the concept of the fetish. Rather, it must be noted that in *The German Ideology* materialist science has as its primary task not the unmasking of an obscured reality, nor even the correction of the ideological inversions, but the study of what is immediate and present in actuality, specifically the ways in which “individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations” (*CW* 5, 35-6). Thus, Marx and Engels state, “Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production” (*ibid.*). To this, Marx and Engels add the crucial remark that empirical science must study the individuals “not as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they *actually* are; i.e., as they act, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will” (*ibid.*).

Now, in any society, people do not only “produce materially,” they also produce ideas. Ideas can be either true or false, but, whatever their truth-status, they must be the result of the particular make-up of the particular society in which we find them. Where else could their origin lie? Thus, Marx and Engels argue, “The ideas which these individuals form are ideas either about their relation to nature or about their mutual relations or about their own nature. It is evident that in all these cases their ideas are the conscious expression – real or illusory – of their real relationships and activities, of their production, of their intercourse, of their social and political conduct” (*CW* 5, 36 n*). The reverse is only an option in idealist thought: “The opposite assumption is only possible if

1927) that “[a]ll the mysterious, sage and subtle distinctions between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself are sheer philosophical balderdash” (117).

in addition to the spirit of the real, materially evolved individuals a separate spirit is presupposed” (ibid.). Further, if ideas, which reflect back on the reality that gave rise to them, are false, then this, according to Marx and Engels, must in turn be the result of inconsistencies, conflicts, or restrictions in the actuality of material practice: “If the conscious expression of the real relations of these individuals is illusory, if in their imagination they turn reality upside-down, then this in its turn is the result of their limited material mode of activity and their limited social relations arising from it” (ibid.).

To interpret Marx and Engels correctly, we must accept that they have in mind a *historical* concept of consciousness in *The German Ideology*. That is, they are speaking specifically about the thinkers in a class society. These thinkers belong to a society made up of “individuals” who enjoy “limited social relations;” the limitations of the thinkers, however, result specifically from their *exclusive* occupation with mental labor or the production of consciousness/imagination. In either event, Marx and Engels do not use the term “ideology” here, which is what I believe has led to the confusion later commentators, whose understanding of ideology has been shaped by modern developments, have experienced and projected into the text. At the very least, it is clear from the reference to Hegel that Marx and Engels equate consciousness and ideology to such a degree that science and communism are not considered consciousness in the immediate sense.

My reading is further corroborated by the well-known passage that speaks of consciousness as an “efflux” of material reality. This passage has been quoted countless times in the literature and yet is still only poorly understood. It was written by Engels and

is probably the revised version of the paragraph quoted above. In this section of “I. Feuerbach,” Marx and Engels state, “

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men—the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men at this stage still appear as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness [*das Bewusstsein*] can never be anything else than conscious being [*das bewusste Sein*], and the being of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their relations appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.

In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven. That is to say, not of setting out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh; but setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the brains of men are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness. For the first manner of approach the starting-point is consciousness taken as the living individual; for the second manner of approach, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as *their* consciousness. (*CW* 5, 36-7)

We can summarize the argument in these paragraphs as follows: 1. Consciousness is always determined by the “real life-process”; 2. Some time in the past, when there was no division between mental and manual labor, this determination was “direct” and consciousness was never anything but “conscious being”; 3. With the development of the division of labor, consciousness took on a “semblance of independence”; 4. This

condition creates ideology: *pure thought* or *philosophizing* that posits itself as the product of an autonomous history of ideas; 5. Ideology's mistakes or "phantoms" (such as the notion that "living individuals," the subjects of history, are what they are on account of how they construct themselves ideally) are not accidental but the necessary result of the ideologists' particular "limited modes of activity and limited social relations," that is, their particular, exclusively mental, realm of practice. It is thus the alienation inherent in the social division of labor that produces idealist "reflexes."⁵²¹

Finally, the two paragraphs that follow the one just quoted reinforce the connection between consciousness *qua* mental labor and philosophical idealism. Idealist philosophy had proclaimed the sovereignty of Spirit or ideal essences. However, the empiricists (Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, and the French *idéologues*) also viewed material reality in an abstract manner and therefore retained idealist tendencies. The most recent philosophy, ideology, was aimed at conceiving material reality concretely but still remained subject to the metaphysical propensities that traditional Idealism and the "old" materialism shared. Historical materialism, according to Marx and Engels, breaks with this pattern because

This manner of approach is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and fixity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts as it is with the empiricists (themselves still abstract), or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists.

Where speculation ends, where real life starts, there consequently begins real, positive science, the expounding of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty phrases about consciousness end, and real knowledge has to take their place. When the reality is described, a self-sufficient

⁵²¹ The social division of labor is distinguished by Marx from the technical division of labor; for a discussion of this the concept of the division of labor in Marx and the distinction between social and technical division of labor, see, for example, Bob Beamish, *Marx, Method, and the Division of Labor* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

philosophy [*die selbständige Philosophie*] loses its medium of existence. At the best its place can only be taken by a summing-up of the most general results, abstractions which are derived from the observation of the historical development of men. These abstractions in themselves, divorced from real history, have no value whatsoever. They can only serve to facilitate the arrangement of historical material, to indicate the sequence of its separate strata. But they by no means afford a recipe or schema, as does philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history. On the contrary, the difficulties begin only when one sets about the examination and arrangement of the material—whether of a past epoch or of the present—and its actual presentation. The removal of these difficulties is governed by premises which certainly cannot be stated here, but which only the study of the actual life-process and the activity of the individuals of each epoch will make evident. We shall select here some of these abstractions, which we use in contradistinction to ideology, and shall illustrate them by historical examples. (35-7)⁵²²

With the last part of the clean copy of the manuscript thus reproduced here, it is possible to make a few salient points. To begin with, it should be noted that Marx and Engels's critique of ideology is folded into, not synonymous with, their discussion of the relation between material practice and ideas. To put it differently, one could say that the basic doctrine of historical materialism that ideas are determined by material practice contains (1), rather than coincides with, a materialist theory of idealist distortion (2), which rests on a theory of the division between mental and manual labor (3). Too often, the first two postulates have been conflated and the third elided. Too many times, Marx scholars have made the case that the ideology concept is essentially the same thing as, or merely a more elaborate explication of, the fundamental premise of dialectical materialism, that is, of the doctrine that the base determines the superstructure. In this context, the terms "superstructure" and "ideology" have been used interchangeably. Without further clarification, this has often been taken to mean that all political and symbolic products

⁵²² Another standard translation (the 1964 translation and edition by S. Ryazanskaya) does not stick quite as closely to the German and renders some phrases differently: "manner of approach," for example, is translated as "method of approach"; "the expounding of" as "the representation of"; and "a self-sufficient philosophy" as "philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge" (in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels-Reader*, 146-200).

and processes are ideological. This notion is evident in statements such as that of Paul Ricoeur, who says that in *The German Ideology*, “[t]he concept of ideology may be large enough to cover not only distortions but all representations, all *Vorstellungen*.”⁵²³ The effect of this is a trivialization of Marxian theory and a reduction of Marx and Engels’s ideology critique to a sociology of knowledge.⁵²⁴

This collapse of the difference between the general notion of consciousness as ideas *en toto* and the particular notion of consciousness as the philosophical or quasi-philosophical *study of ideas*, i.e. ideology, has so far prevented a fruitful theorization of the role of mental labor in society. Because Marx saw distortion as a defining characteristic of all ideology, and the concepts of ideology and symbolic/political distortion have become identical in contemporary theory, there has been little effort to pursue Marx and Engels’s indictment of the classed nature of the production of consciousness in bourgeois society. Especially the idea that Marx conceived of all thinking as distorted has elicited forceful denunciations of Marx’s alleged “economism,” that is, his apparent determination to portray all non-economic aspects of social life as insignificant epiphenomena. However, when the terms “*camera obscura*,” “retina,”

⁵²³ Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 77. The question with which critics have wrestled for decades is whether Marx intended to stamp all forms of thinking as “ideological” or only particular ones. The former view is seemingly supported by the fact that the sentence “Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence” is immediately followed by the phrase “If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*. . . .” This appears to suggest that all thought is ideology *because* it inverts the fact of the material conditioning of all mental production by appearing independent. The alternative interpretation, however, is also lent textual evidence by such passages as the crossed-out portion of the text in which Marx and Engels say that certain “conscious expressions of the real relations” are “illusory if . . . they turn reality upside-down.” The confusion is rooted in the lack of nuance that has dominated definitions of consciousness and related concepts. It is obvious that Marx and Engels contrasted their own materialist account of the “production of ideas, of conceptions, and of consciousness” with the *camera obscura* vision of “all ideology” and therefore distinguished ideological and non-ideological forms of thinking.

⁵²⁴ For a discussion of the difference between the ideology concept in the sociology of knowledge and in Marx, see, for instance, Ariane Fischer, “Settling Accounts with the Sociology of Knowledge: Mannheim, the Frankfurt School, and the Critique of Metaphysics,” forthcoming, in *The Frankfurt School*, ed. by Alfred Drake (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009).

“echoes,” and “sublimates” are placed in their proper context, it becomes evident that Marx and Engels used them to describe not all ideas that people might have, i.e. not consciousness as something generically human, but rather only those ideal constructs belonging to the philosophical thought form (*Denkform*), to use the language of the theory of phenomenal forms. This makes sense not only because (the Young Hegelian) philosophy is indeed the main target of Marx and Engels’s critique of ideology but also because philosophers had traditionally viewed and legitimized themselves as “guardians” of Consciousness, just as priests were the guardians of the word of God. In both cases, the “manner of approach” is a result of a restricted sphere of activity: the material seclusion in the realm of “pure thought” produces the ideal notion that an independent realm of spirits moves history. The occlusion of this aspect of Marx’s ideology critique, then, brings with it the occlusion of the critique of mental labor as a form of alienation.

Another important point is that if Marx had something quite more specific in mind when he spoke of consciousness than what contemporary cultural studies and critical theory have in mind⁵²⁵, it follows that we can reject at least one standard criticism advanced against “I. Feuerbach.” This criticism is essentially a three-pronged commentary that begins by applauding Marx and Engels for stressing the material basis of all consciousness, then chastises them for not simultaneously recognizing the determining effect of consciousness, and finally accuses them of hypocrisy because they seem to exempt their own materialist science from the inversions apparently inherent in “all ideology.” Regarding the first two issues, one should note that the primacy of material practice is *the* core doctrine of historical materialism. The doctrine of the

⁵²⁵ For a good idea for how the early cultural studies conceived ideology *qua* consciousness, see Michele Barrett, Philip Corrigan, Annette Kuhn, and Janet Wolff, *Ideology and Cultural Production* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979).

primacy of consciousness is directly opposed to it and cannot consistently be accommodated under Marx's manner of approach. At the same time, when they speak of "practice," they conceive a unity of thought and action, i.e. what is now intended in the term "praxis"; however, what is excluded in this concept is the "critical consciousness" of the ideologist and his systematic (pre-)occupation with ostensibly sovereign ideas. This links up with the third aspect of the critique, in response to which it bears repeating that Marx and Engels did not dispute the historical determination of materialist thought. However, knowledge is not false by virtue of being dependent on material conditions. Natural science depends on nature just as the science of human history depends on actual historical developments. This elementary fact does not mean that claims to scientificity are a contradiction in terms. Unlike ideology, science is not a study of ostensibly disembodied ideas. Rather, like material practice, it is defined by a preoccupation with real people and their interests. Unfortunately, the question of how exactly scientific materialism breaks the connection between mental activity and the fixation on ideas is not addressed in *The German Ideology*, though the answer must surely be sought in the theorist's identification with the interests of the revolutionary class.

Yet another issue is the function of abstraction. First, the quote above demonstrates clearly that abstraction is not necessarily idealist. Not only philosophy but also science, including historical materialism, uses abstraction. Only when abstract premises take the place of the "study of the actual life-process," when they inform empirical inquiry *a priori*, then theoretical abstraction becomes idealist. This point is important because it shows that Marx and Engels did not advocate an anti-intellectualist

or populist position.⁵²⁶ All to the contrary, they argued that when gained by careful deduction and checked against empirical facts, the theoretical abstractions of a positive science can assist in the revolutionary struggle.⁵²⁷ The abstractions produced by ideology, however, are those of pure thought, which has actually become a separate sphere, removed from the realm of activity of the majority of people. This would be the meaning of “real abstraction” in *The German Ideology*.

In light of these observations, Marx and Engels’s general methodological comments about ideology in “I. Feuerbach” need to be reconsidered. The famous statement about “morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these”⁵²⁸ suggests that Marx and Engels wished to differentiate between the practice of mental labor (here “ideology”) and the ideal products of this practice (termed “consciousness”). As mentioned earlier, it is often argued that the expression “all the rest of ideology” is evidence of the fact that Marx and Engels considered the whole of what he later called *Überbau* ideological. The problem with this reading is, as we have learned, that not all parts of the superstructure in bourgeois society can be rendered intelligible under the rubric of the production of idealist thought or the philosophical critique of ideas. Even if we assume for a moment

⁵²⁶ However, it is possible that *The German Ideology* puts forth a philosophy of spontaneity which Lenin attacked later in his arguments with Luxemburg.

⁵²⁷ For a good discussion of abstraction in Marx’s dialectic, see Bertell Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁵²⁸ It may be worth noting here that the original German version of this quote is lacking the comma after “metaphysics.” It reads, “Die Moral, Religion, Metaphysik und sonstige Ideologie und die ihnen entsprechenden Bewußtseinsformen. . . .” This discrepancy may simply be a minor grammatical matter. However, it may also indicate that Marx and Engels meant for “metaphysics and the rest of ideology” to be a unit, parallel to “morality, religion, and their corresponding forms of consciousness.” There are, of course, other passages in *The German Ideology* that show that Marx and Engels did in fact view morality, religion, etc. as forms of ideology. One may conclude from this apparent ambiguity that if there are in fact a “narrow” and a “broad” definition of ideology at work in the text (as the literature has suggested), they refer in fact not to philosophy and to representation as such but to philosophical idealism and idealism in general, respectively.

that only those institutions and structures that function to re-produce (in the sense of re-flect, rather than re-inforce) the *status quo* are included in Marx's concept of superstructure, we must ask under what circumstances it would be meaningful to call the superstructure as a whole "ideological." It is my argument that the media, education, the state, etc. can be many different things, for instance conservative, bourgeois, nationalist, patriarchal, imperialist, etc., but they need not be idealistic in the way that theology, ethics committees, and psychology are, nor do they qualify for being considered "philosophical" in the strict sense.

To complicate matters, Marx and Engels use the phrase "idealistic superstructure" (*CW* 5, 89), the meaning of which can be clarified given what has been said so far. It is highly likely that Marx and Engels did not intend to designate with this expression the whole superstructure as "idealistic" but only that part of the superstructure that maintains an appearance of sovereignty by rationalizing its existence as a consequence and function of pure ideas or *a priori* concepts. Cultural theory has variously called this "universalization," "naturalization," or even "reification." Some parts of the superstructure derive their *raison d'être* from the preoccupation with ideas. These forms tend towards idealism, and one of these the forms is ideology, the critical philosophy of false consciousness. Like its political or juridical equivalents (which Marx and Engels also call ideological), this philosophy systematically inverts the relation between material conditions and ideas as a result of being restricted to the study of concepts and abstractions. Together, these forms constitute the "idealistic superstructure." Incidentally, Marx and Engels would have created far less confusion if they had retained this

terminology for what they ended up calling “ideology in general” and reserved the word “ideology” only for the philosophy of false consciousness, or “ideology in particular.”

The manner in which the division between mental and manual labor relates to the base-superstructure schema is highly complex. To begin with, the social division of labor is closely linked to the relations of production. While there is division of labor *within* the classes, the division between mental and manual labor is essentially an expression of class relations as such, i.e. it is a moment of the separation *between* the classes.⁵²⁹ To explain this plainly is to say that mental labor, defined as the exemption from manual (usually unpleasant) labor, has historically been the domain of the dominant classes.⁵³⁰ Hence, insofar as mental labor is a matter of class, it is an integral aspect of the material conditions, i.e. the base. Of course, the ideologists were not capitalists; they did not command a labor force. They did, however, own their own means of production, and, when looked at from this perspective, their activity can be grasped economically.

The argument that mental labor is primarily economic could also be taken in a slightly different direction. After all, mental labor, while not “material” in the same way as “manual” labor⁵³¹, is nonetheless labor and therefore a material force. G. A. Cohen argues this point with respect to science. He maintains that the superstructure consists of

⁵²⁹ John Hoffman intimates the nature of this relation in *Marxism and the Theory of Praxis: A Critique of Some New Versions of Old Fallacies* (New York: International Publishers, 1975) when he says that “the sharp division between theory and practice . . . reflects a division, at a much more basic level, between mental and manual labour and this division lies at the heart of every exploiting society” (11).

⁵³⁰ This relation, of course, has never been clear-cut [see, for instance, Raymond Williams’s discussion of mental labor in a chapter on “Culture” in David McLellan (ed.), *Marx: The First Hundred Years* [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983], 15-56) and has become much more complicated since the explosion of the information sector. A contemporary account of the division of mental and manual labor today cannot ignore the fact that workers in the service industry, while occupied primarily with ideas, do not generally own the productively necessary means of production and produce surplus value for their employer. For an interesting perspective on this, see, for example, Martha E. Gimenez’s short piece about academics performing clerical work in addition to their jobs as teachers and researchers: Self-Sourcing: How Corporations Get Us to Work Without Pay!” (*Monthly Review*, September 2007).

⁵³¹ The relationship between “manual” and “material” is too complex to be explored here; suffice it to say that the terms are connected *via* “sensuousness,” but the concept of “material practice” is not isomorphic with that of “manual labor.”

institutions, not knowledge, and that scientific knowledge is not superstructural but “foundational.”⁵³² Scientific institutions might be considered part of the superstructure, but “knowledge is not an institution.”⁵³³ It is important to note, however, that Cohen’s argument differs from the one offered here.⁵³⁴ Yet, Cohen’s point is interesting. Emphasizing the economic aspect of historical transformation over its political aspect, Cohen claims that “the development of knowledge is . . . the centre of the development of the productive forces.”⁵³⁵ The analytical Marxism of Cohen is in this respect not altogether unlike Jürgen Habermas’s much differently motivated argument that technocratic consciousness has become an economic force. Moishe Postone has taken up this latter line of thought but given it a more hopeful note, investing scientific-technological rationality with the power to replace industrial labor as the driving force of historical change.⁵³⁶

Cohen’s elaborations are insightful for our discussion because, after having affirmed the material status of scientific labor, Cohen makes certain to deny this same status to ideology. He states that not all knowledge but only “scientific knowledge which is open to productive use is a productive force.”⁵³⁷ This works with Marx and Engels’s approach because for them the defining characteristic of ideology is precisely that it is not

⁵³² This is not the approach used here. Knowledge, in the present discussion, is “structural” rather than “superstructural” not because ideas are “forces” rather than institutions but because it has a two-fold character: it is labor, and it produces ideas. Ideas in their ideal aspect, in this discussion, are fully superstructural.

⁵³³ Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*, 45.

⁵³⁴ Knowledge, in the present discussion, is “structural” rather than “superstructural” not because ideas are “forces” rather than institutions (which would contradict Marx and Engels’s anti-idealism) but because it has a two-fold character: it is labor, and it produces ideas. Ideas in their ideal aspect, in this discussion, are fully superstructural. However, as labor, they are part of the economic structure.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ See Jürgen Habermas, “Ideology,” in Tom Bottomore (ed.), *Interpretations of Marx* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 299-309; and Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1993]).

⁵³⁷ Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*, 45.

productively relevant. It also works because the assertion that ideology *qua* mental labor is an element of the material substratum of society does not require a commitment to the (idealist) premise that ideology is historically “productive.” Of course, the base-superstructure problem is infinitely more involved than can be shown here, and it would be presumptuous to hope to solve one of the most vexing problems in Marxist theory in this dissertation. It will, therefore, suffice to note that in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels conceive of ideology *qua* mental labor as an economic reality and of ideology *qua* consciousness as a non-productive superstructure.

In conclusion, some qualifications to the previous discussion are in order. First, it is not useful to try to squeeze every one of Marx’s theories and critical approaches into the base-superstructure mold and expect a perfect fit. A model is an abstraction and must be treated as such; that is, as soon as it gets in the way of, or impedes, careful examination of some aspect of concrete reality, it should be put aside. Second, my solution to the connection between ideology and base-superstructure should not be confused with the post-modern, post-human, or some other anti-Cartesian notion that there is no such thing as individual people’s minds or that absolutely everything is material. Ideology is a concrete form of activity, but it is material in the Marxian sense not because it is “natural” (because neurons are working in the brain) but because it is historically specific, *social* work. Third, it has thus become clear that Marx and Engels’s critique of ideology is not a critique of ideas *per se*. Their concept of consciousness *qua* philosophy *qua* mental labor means that they did not consider as ideological the ideas people may hold as they go about their day, or the ideas that the working class develops about its condition and employs in the struggle against its conditions of existence. Marx

and Engels's interest in *The German Ideology* was to explain idealist philosophy in terms of history and society.

Feuerbach and the Revolutionary Struggle

The reading thus developed can be developed further with the help of the rough copies for "I. Feuerbach." What has been said thus far can be gleaned from the clean copy of the introduction, which consists of two versions that are combined in the *Collected Works* and takes up only about 10 pages in the printed edition prepared by Progress Publishers. However, there are three additional, independently written parts, all of which are rough copies. The first of those is numbered [II] and contains the substance of the chapter on Feuerbach. It is 20 pages in length. The other two parts ([III] and [IV]) are two theoretical digressions that were originally integrated into the chapter on Stirner and subsequently moved into the introduction. [III] is the discussion of the ruling ideas and is only three pages long. [IV] is a little longer, approximately 30 pages, and discusses the idealist conception of bourgeois society. The rough draft of the introduction continues with two rather damaged pages on idealism's erroneous conception of human emancipation.

The critique formulated in these fragments holds both a summary of Marx and Engels's objections against idealist philosophies of revolution as well as their own materialist approach to the question of liberation. Their objections amount to the reminder that

the "liberation" of "man" is not advanced a single step by reducing philosophy, theology, substance and all the rubbish to "self-consciousness" and by liberating "man" from the domination of these phrases, which have never held them in thrall . . . [I]t is possible to achieve real liberation only in the real world and by real means. . . . "Liberation" is a historical and not a mental act, and it is brought about by historical conditions. . . . In Germany, a country where only a trivial historical

development is taking place, these mental developments, these glorified and ineffective trivialities, naturally serve as a substitute for the lack of historical development, and they take root and have to be combated. (*CW* 5, 38)

According to Marx and Engels, Bauer and Stirner have it wrong because they believe that merely the critique of Hegelian categories and all other philosophical constructs will bring about emancipation. The “real means” that are the condition of “real liberation” (as opposed to “philosophic liberation”⁵³⁸) are at first based on basic needs, for “people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity” (*ibid.*). Technology (exemplified by the steam engine and the mule jenny) provides the conditions for the creation of new needs. However, far from providing a technocratic model of progress, Marx and Engels maintain that “in reality and for the *practical materialist*, i.e. the *communist*, [for whom] it is a question of revolutionising the existing world, of practically coming to grips with and changing the things found in existence” (*ibid.*, 38-9). The “real world” changes as a result of human practice both economic and political. Idealist philosophy, however, does not recognize the revolutionary action of practical materialism and the practical materialism of revolutionary action. In the words used in first of the “Theses,” Feuerbach is thus reproached because he “does not grasp the significance of ‘revolutionary,’ of practical-critical, activity” (*CW* 5, 6). Interestingly, Marx and Engels do not primarily accuse their opponents of not participating actively in the workers’ struggles. While this is certainly an aspect of the critique of the detached thinker (who is actually not nearly as detached as he would imagine himself to be), Marx and Engels do not here juxtapose practice and theory in a simplistic manner but rather theoretical practice that understands the material process of historical liberation and theoretical practice that does not.

⁵³⁸ This distinction is made by Marx in a marginal note (*ibid.*, 38, note *).

In *The German Ideology*, the idea that theory must grasp the material process of historical transformation, which Marx and Engels call “concrete practice,” is *emergent*. To understand this, it is important to recognize first of all that the manuscript is a polemic against Hegel’s atheist critics, which indicates that Marx and Engels were concerned specifically with the fallacies of the new philosophies that aimed to substitute an immanentist concept of human consciousness for the quasi-religious notion of an extra-human Consciousness. Strictly speaking, then, we must grasp the critique of *The German Ideology* as an aspect of Marx’s critique of “all previous materialism,” mentioned in the “Theses on Feuerbach.” The revision of *their own* previous materialism *vis-à-vis* Feuerbach is crucial in this development. Forced by Stirner to reexamine Feuerbach’s reduction of Hegel, they come to the conclusion in *The German Ideology* that in constructing the abstract category of “Man,” Feuerbach did not fully succeed in displacing Hegel’s idealism. Thus, they state that in Feuerbach’s work “such views [that are based on real practice] . . . are never more than isolated surmises and have much too little influence on his general outlook to be considered here as anything but embryos capable of development” (*CW* 5, 39). Similarly, in the “Theses,” Marx says that Feuerbach’s “contemplative materialism,” like the other materialisms before him, conceives sensuous reality “only in the form of the *object*, or of *contemplation*, but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively” (*ibid.*). In other words, Feuerbach thinks of reality as something passive or receptive, i.e. objective, but not as active or constitutive, i.e. subjective. It is this materialism that Marx and Engels now denounce.

In the course of their discussion of Feuerbach, Marx and Engels challenge not only his concept of reality but also his approach to truth and nature. Feuerbach lacks a

notion of reality as simultaneously objective *and* subjective. Further, he does not grasp reality as constant movement. Finally, as far as he has a sense of the human collectivity, he cannot think below the species level. These three problems alone make Feuerbach's humanism ahistorical and essentialist. Therefore, Feuerbach's concept of "man" is far removed from "real historical man" (*CW* 5, 39). In fact, this is why Marx and Engels consistently prefer the plural term "men" when speaking of humans as groups of individuals. The world is for him only a "thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same" (*ibid.*), and truth is a "higher, philosophical" knowledge that "perceives the 'true essence of things'" (*ibid.*).⁵³⁹ According to Marx and Engels, the sensuous world, as an expression of human nature, is a "historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, and modifying its social system according to the changed needs" (*ibid.*). If human nature is malleable and in flux, then human knowledge is also inextricably historical. What's more, all knowledge is a product of social practice, meaning that it too is subjective and objective. In this context, Marx and Engels establish that forms of knowing are also forms of doing and that truth is inescapably bound up with concrete interests.⁵⁴⁰ Finally, they argue that in modern civilization, nature as an object to be known by the thinking subject is not opposed to

⁵³⁹ Marx is here criticizing the notion of a "double perception" and the distinction between two faculties, "a profane one which perceives 'only the flatly obvious' and a 'higher one'" (*ibid.*).

⁵⁴⁰ This passage entails a critique of the idea that there is such a thing as "pure science": "Feuerbach speaks in particular of the perception of natural science; he mentions secrets which are disclosed only to the eye of the physicist and chemist; but where would natural science be without industry and commerce? Even this 'pure' natural science is provided with an aim, as with its material, only through trade and industry, through the sensuous activity of men" (*CW* 5, 40).

humans as an external entity; rather, nature is always-already “humanized” and historical.⁵⁴¹

The most important consequent problem with Feuerbach’s philosophical materialism, as Marx and Engels see it, is that it eschews actual social contradictions as if they were not relevant, and when it does address the question of the meaning of “society,” it becomes sentimental or normative. Marx and Engels differentiate between “pure materialism,”⁵⁴² Feuerbach’s sensuous materialism, and a materialism based on practice. Setting their own approach apart from that of Feuerbach, they argue that Feuerbach “still remains in the realm of theory and conceives of men not in their given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life, which have made them *what they are*” (*CW* 5, 41). As a result, “he never arrives at the actually existing, active men, but stops at the abstraction ‘man,’ and gets no further than recognising ‘the actual, individual, corporeal man’ emotionally, i.e., he knows no other ‘human relations’ ‘of man to man’ than love and friendship” (*ibid.*). The final consequence is that Feuerbach “gives no criticism of the present conditions of life” (*ibid.*).

The distinction, then, between Marx and Engels’s materialism and Feuerbach’s materialism is that the former is aligned with communism as a *practical movement*, not an abstract idea. Feuerbach, that is, “never manages to conceive the sensuous world as the total living sensuous *activity* of the individuals composing it; therefore . . . he is

⁵⁴¹ In this discussion of the historicity of nature, Marx and Engels astutely remark that nature, as it is outside or before human beings, is relevant only for the distinction between humans and nature. For the science of history, however, it is irrelevant because “nature, the nature that preceded human history, is not by any means the nature in which Feuerbach lives, it is nature which today no longer exists anywhere” (*ibid.*, 40). Rather similarly, in a discussion of Feuerbach’s theoretical communism, they note that external nature has almost ceased to exist and that “every new invention, every advance made by industry, detaches another piece from this domain, so that the ground which produces examples illustrating such Feuerbachian propositions is steadily shrinking” (*ibid.*, 58). The example they give is that of the fish whose “natural habitat” can no longer be said to be the water of the river if the river in question is utilized for industrial purposes and has become uninhabitable for the fish.

⁵⁴² By this term they seem to refer to the natural scientists of the eighteenth century.

compelled . . . to relapse into idealism at the very point where the communist materialist sees the necessity, and at the same time the condition, of a transformation both of industry and of the social structure” (ibid). Practical communism cannot be understood separately from history; it is not a fact of nature but emerges at a particular moment.

Therefore, if materialism seeks to understand *society*, it must understand *history*.

Feuerbach has a notion of history, but this notion is an idealist one: “As far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he considers history he is not a materialist. With him materialism and history diverge completely” (*CW* 5, 41).

Feuerbach idealized human relations not only because he believed in “love” (of one’s fellow human being) as the universal mediation but also because he believed that alienation *resulted from* the fact that humans had erected a false love object: God. Thus, Feuerbach’s materialism was a critique of religion. Inasmuch as Left Hegelianism was a prolonged effort to declare God dead, it was anti-idealist, but inasmuch as its call for a radical reassertion of the anthropological foundation of all rationality was based on the assumption of a self-imposed slavery to an alienated consciousness, it remained “devoid of premises.” That is, it failed to identify the real source of oppression. On the flipside, Feuerbach also grasped the end of alienation as a purely mental achievement or process, which is why Marx and Engels felt justified in lumping Feuerbach together with Stirner and Bauer.

The problem with the Young Hegelian critique of religion, as Marx and Engels had come to realize, was that it treated consciousness as the original and the only significant moment of social life and refused to recognize material practice, material production, and material interests as primary “historical facts” rather than concepts.

When Strauß and Bauer, in their critique of the gospels, made a forceful contribution to the secularization of philosophy by arguing against Christian doctrine, and in particular against the notion of the personal God and the factuality of the biblical account, they prepared the ground for Feuerbach's radical attack on the religious construction of a non-human alien Subject as well as for Stirner's even more sweeping rejection of all supra-individual abstractions, including that of the "human." But Marx and Engels do not acknowledge these accomplishments in the interest of diplomacy. Instead, they focus on the fact that the Young Hegelians, in their assault on religious and quasi-religious forms of "canonization," effectively fetishized these forms, imbuing them with omnipotence. By perpetually ignoring or forgetting that "[c]onsciousness is . . . from the beginning a social product" (*CW* 5, 44)⁵⁴³, the critique of religion is inevitably bound to overlook the obvious truth, as revealed in the physical act of speaking, that "[t]he 'mind' is from the outset afflicted with the curse of being 'burdened' with matter" (*ibid.*, 43-44).

"Mind" is, as explained, typically understood by Marx and Engels as mental labor, and as such it is part and parcel of the contradictions arising from the process of production. "Mind" does not know this, of course. Metaphorically speaking, one could say that the ideologists' "speculative impulse" (*CW* 5, 42) is a genetic predisposition that prompts the thinker to overlook systematically the life-process in general and the effects of the division of labor in particular.⁵⁴⁴ Philosophical idealism, then, is produced by conditions that it cannot grasp. This is the dilemma. However, it is of no great concern,

⁵⁴³ The passage that follows seems to be a rough draft of the previously cited section in the clean copy that starts with "The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men—the language of real life" (*CW* 5, 36). The rough copy describes this early "stage" of consciousness as "herd-consciousness," "sheep-like or tribal consciousness," and "animal consciousness of nature (natural religion)" (*ibid.*, 44).

⁵⁴⁴ This is precisely what sociological approaches leave out. For just one contemporary revamping of Mannheim's theory of ideology, see Tim Dant, *Knowledge, Ideology, and Discourse: A Sociological Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

maintain Marx and Engels. The fact that philosophy cannot account for its own conditions of possibility is of no special significance for the study of history whose aim it is to examine the real contradictions that constitute the materialist dialectic. The movement of history is practical, and, as Marx and Engels clearly argue as early as 1845/46, it emerges from the clash between economic forces and social relations. They do not call it “class struggle” in *The German Ideology*, but they conceive it in terms of the mode of production, the dominant form of “intercourse,” and the tension resulting from certain “fetters and limitations.”

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, Marx and Engels declare the division between mental and manual labor as the quintessential expression of the division of labor in general: “Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears” (*CW* 5, 44). They imply that labor that is divided need not be divided in kind: The splitting off of intellectual labor, however, is the relegation of one particular aspect of social life to an exclusive domain. Thinking becomes a special sphere that appears detached from social relations because it is detached from the other spheres of labor: “From this moment onwards consciousness *can* really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it *really* represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of ‘pure’ theory, theology, philosophy, morality, etc.” (ibid.).

Marx and Engels state more explicitly that it is only at this point that reality produces a semblance of itself, a semblance which proceeds to portray itself as the ultimate reality. Once emancipated, consciousness exists at a remove from material

reality. Because this distance will ultimately collapse, Marx and Engels hypothesizes, “it is quite immaterial what consciousness starts to do on its own” (*CW* 5, 45). Eventually, the division of labor will self-destruct for the same reasons that capitalism will eventually bring about its own demise. Since the division of labor is one means by which class relations manifest themselves, the abolition of class coincides with the abolition of exclusively mental labor. Put slightly differently, class society, where consciousness is a privilege and exclusionary, produces conflict. Thus, Marx and Engels draw “the one inference that these three moments, the productive forces, the state of society and consciousness, can and must come into contradiction with one another” (*ibid.*). In other words, religious, political, and philosophical activity are in stark opposition to the economic and social relations “because the *division of labour* implies the possibility, nay the fact, that intellectual and material activity, that enjoyment and labour, production and consumption, devolve on different individuals, and that the only possibility of their not coming into contradiction lies in negating in its turn the division of labour” (*ibid.*).

The explanations Marx and Engels give here are still a far cry from Marx’s later formulations. In chapter 32 of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx was to express the idea as follows: “Centralisation of the means of production and socialization of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.”⁵⁴⁵ In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels have not yet developed a concept of surplus value, and so they explain class in terms of private property and the division of labor; however, the advantage of their emphasis on the relation between class and the division between mental and manual labor is that it allows

⁵⁴⁵ *MEGA* 2, 661-2.

them to specify the reasons why consciousness, no matter how much it deems itself independent, is deeply implicated in the social reality, with which it will inevitably come into conflict.

The quoted passage further helps us to clear away the apparent paradox how ideology can at the same time be directly tied to particular material interests and conditions *and* be activity that has become unstuck from material reality. The solution lies in the fact that ideology has become detached from the reality of the working masses but of course not from material relations, i.e. class, as such. The ideologists' activity may *really* be restricted to the intellectual realm, which gives them the impression that they are working in the service of a world apart, but that does not mean that priests ("the first form of ideologists" [*CW* 5, 45, note *)⁵⁴⁶, politicians⁵⁴⁷, philosophers, and scientists have left behind the world. In fact, an interesting irony obtains because, if the ideologists "labor" under the illusion that people have placed themselves under the rule of their estranged ideas, they are both wrong and right. They are wrong because people's ideas are not estranged; their lives are. Yet, perversely, the ideologists are also right because they, as producers of (alienated) consciousness, are themselves members of the class that rules society by way of the dominant property relations. Unfortunately, Marx and Engels do not elaborate in great detail on the exact nature of the position of the ideologists *vis-à-vis* the bourgeoisie. The ideologist-philosopher does not have capital to work for him, but in the nascently capitalist Germany, the independently wealthy philosopher, just as much as the philosopher who is paid by the State, belonged to the dominant class rather than to

⁵⁴⁶ This comment appears in a marginal note where Marx notes that the beginnings of the division between mental and manual labor brought with it the rise of the priestly caste.

⁵⁴⁷ In another note, Marx refers to state-politics as idealist "practical consciousness" (*CW* 5, 45, note ****), which shows once more the complex intersection of practice and theory that Marx and Engels develop in *The German Ideology*.

the working class. Bearing witness to this fact is ideology's representation of class rule as the rule of ideas.

Again, however, it is not ideology's (mis)representation of the relations of domination that matter but their real abolition. Just as Marx theorized later that capitalism digs its own grave by bringing forth "the material agencies for its own dissolution"⁵⁴⁸, he argues in *The German Ideology* that the alienation that produces ideology will also lead to its eradication. First, "[t]his fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into a material power above us, growing out of our control . . . is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now" (*CW* 5, 47-8). Second, alienation will come to an end by way of the same historical development that it has fuelled. However, this process is not an abstract accomplishment "on the part of 'self-consciousness,' the world spirit, or of any other metaphysical spectre, but a quite material, empirically verifiable act" (*ibid.*, 51). Rather, it is the result of a *world-historical* act carried out by the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries: "Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples 'all at once' and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with them" (*ibid.*, 49).

The advent of communism signifies the end of ideology insofar as it works toward the end of the division between mental and manual labor and the end of class society. However, communism is also a movement aimed at the abolition of the division of labor in general. Thus, having clarified that "[d]ivision of labor and private property are, after all, identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity" (*CW* 5,

⁵⁴⁸ *MEGA* 2, 660.

46), Marx and Engels oppose the “natural” and the “voluntary” organization of labor. In an interesting reversal of categories, they posit that the splitting off of consciousness is a “natural” event that is overcome by “society.” What is natural is not what must be restored but what must be left behind:

[A]s long . . . as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man’s own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. For as soon as the division of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; whereas in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic. (Ibid., 47)

Communism is precisely not an unattainable ideal, a “categorical imperative,” as Stirner and Bauer claim, but a revolutionary practice. In other words, communism is not a future society as much as a movement of the present that works to establish a new future society. It is possible to discern here a real resemblance between Marx and Engels’s ideas and Antonio Negri’s theories. However, Marx and Engels are here referring to *communism* as a distinct movement, not labor in general. (Even so, there is a connection between Negri’s expansive notion of revolutionary practice and Marx and Engels’s concept of labor itself as revolutionary. The difference is that Marx and Engels precisely excluded petty-bourgeois forms of resistance that are the hallmark of revolutionary energy for Hardt and Negri. The anti-globalization movement and the 1868 movement would likely be interpreted very differently by Marx and Engels.) The argument is pursued in detail once Marx and Engels examine the arguments in Stirner’s *Ego*. In “I. Feuerbach,” they merely summarize their position by saying that “[c]ommunism is for us

not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the now existing premise” (ibid., 49).⁵⁴⁹ Not the communists but the ideologists set up artificial goals for history and invent purposes and objectives that have nothing to do with actual developments. Communism, from this perspective, is the historical force that overcomes ideology. It is a question of history: the communist society, which is unquestionably the society that will be established by the communist revolution, is something that emerges only with, and only after, the revolutionary break initiated by the communist movement. Practice always precedes theory.

Marx and Engels base their arguments about communism on a materialist conception of history, which they juxtapose to certain teleological distortions. They seem to suggest that communism is not a description of history, a narrative, but an immediate subject of history itself. Philosophy, and possibly any theoretical or ideational activity, on the other hand, may distort its object. This, however, is of no consequence other than that the historian must be able to separate the series of actual, contingent events of the past and present from their idealist interpretations:

History is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which uses the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity. This can be speculatively distorted so that later history is made the goal of earlier history, e.g., the goal ascribed to the discovery of America is to further the eruption of the French Revolution. Thereby history receives its own special goals and becomes a “person ranking with other persons” (to wit: “self-consciousness, criticism, the unique,” etc.), while what is designated with the word “destiny,” “goal,” “germ,” or “idea”

⁵⁴⁹ This paragraph was written by Marx. It was added to the part of the section on the world revolution in the rough copy of the introduction (see *CW* 5, 49, note a).

of earlier history is nothing more than an abstraction from later history, from the active influence which earlier history exercises on later history. (*CW* 5, 50)

What has become the thorny problem of historical necessity is not conceived by Marx and Engels as a problem at all. Communist society is not a telos; that is, it is not something that will come about “naturally.” The outcome is not set by providence. History does not have a destiny or a single, final result. Rather, I would argue, much like Achilles, history for Marx and Engels may well have more than one “fate.” At the same time, communism as a real movement in history is *a* determinate result of all previous history. However, just as feudalism did not have the goal to transform itself into capitalism, so it is useless to say that capitalism will inevitably lead to communism.

Having stressed that overcoming real alienation is the result of a “practical movement” (*CW* 5, 53) and can only be brought about by a communist revolution, which has nothing to do with the “speculative-idealistic” notion of the “self-generation of the species” (*ibid.*, 52), Marx and Engels also emphasize the importance of revolutionary ideas. The concept of praxis is clearly in evidence here. In the section “On the production of consciousness,” they say that a revolution does not take place without consciousness and that successful revolutionary change necessarily involves a change of general consciousness. This is so because the universal class emerges with a “consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness, which may, of course, arise among the other classes too through the contemplation of the situation of this class” (*ibid.*). My reading of this passage is that, in the process of revolutionary transformation, there is a proliferation of mental activity beyond the confines of philosophy, and this change in the division of labor is tied to a change in the nature of

labor. The emergence of a general revolutionary consciousness, then, is one of the signs of the social transformation that leads to the abolition of labor itself.⁵⁵⁰

Communist consciousness is not like the consciousness of “the German theoreticians” (*CW* 5, 51) for two reasons: It breaks with the classed nature of mental labor, and it signals the actual shift from complete subjection to resistance and revolution. With regard to the first point, communist consciousness emanates mainly from the laboring masses, i.e. the class which “has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, . . . is ousted from society and forced into the sharpest contradiction to all other classes . . . [,] and forms the majority of all members of society” (*ibid.*, 52). By developing a revolutionary consciousness, this class is engaged in the practical overthrow of the existing order, for, as Marx and Engels put it in the continuation of this passage,

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*; the revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the *ruling* class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew. (*Ibid.*, 53)

This consciousness, in other words, is revolutionary practice. As they say a few pages further, “The existence of revolutionary ideas presupposes the existence of a revolutionary class” (*ibid.*, 60). Revolutionary ideas, then, develop in tandem with the formation of a proletarian class as a social movement. Marx and Engels anticipated the

⁵⁵⁰ By this, Marx and Engels refer to labor as the form that work takes in a class society, specifically capitalism. The following well-known quote expresses this idea:

In all previous revolutions the mode of activity always remained unchanged and it was only a question of a different distribution of this activity, a new distribution of labour to other persons, whilst the communist revolution is directed against the hitherto existing *mode* of activity, does away with *labour*, and abolishes the rule of all classes with the classes themselves, because it is carried through by the class which no longer counts as a class in society, which is not recognised as a class, and is in itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc. within present society. (*CW* 5, 52)

crystallization of such a social movement from the ranks of the ever growing working class.

It is thus clear that Marx and Engels did not argue that ideas have no role whatsoever to play in the transformation of society. However, it is also clear that, when Marx and Engels speak of a “communist consciousness,” they refer not to the philosophical critique of false consciousness but rather to the mental realization that only the active collective struggle against subjection can affect social change. Do they imply, then, that this kind of consciousness is not always realized? It would seem that way, even though the process of the development of a communist consciousness is not perceived as an issue (likely due to the fact that such a communist consciousness seemed to be in evidence at the time). Later, in *Capital*, Marx clearly states that there is a point at which capitalism “breaks down all resistance”⁵⁵¹; in *The German Ideology*, however, Marx and Engels did not see cooptation as a lasting state of affairs. In fact, their theoretical understanding of revolutionary consciousness was very much along the lines of Lukács’s “genetic” argument that particular classes come with particular, ready-made forms of thinking. In the case of the proletariat, there is a “natural” awareness of the necessity of overcoming oppression,⁵⁵² which does not mean, however, that the necessity of change cannot also be recognized in other classes. It is thus established that Marx’s critique of consciousness *qua* mental labor was accompanied with a theory of revolutionary consciousness.

The methodological significance of the practical nature of revolutionary consciousness is that the scientific study of history must look to it in its search for the

⁵⁵¹ *MEGA* 2, 639.

⁵⁵² Again, this differs from the view taken in *Capital* where Marx speaks of a situation when the working class “looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of nature” (ibid.).

causes of social change – not to the constructs of philosophical consciousness. In their constant wrangling about the essence of reality that is supposedly obfuscated by a panoply of false appearances, the critics merely represent their own alienation from the material forces of history to themselves:

It [the materialist approach to history] has not, like the idealist view of history, to look for a category in every period, but remains constantly on the real *ground* of history; it does not explain practice from the idea but explains the formation of ideas from material practice, and accordingly it comes to the conclusion that all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism, by resolution into “self-consciousness” or transformation into “apparitions,” “spectres,” “whimsies,” etc., but only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which gave rise to this idealistic humbug; that not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history, also of religion, of philosophy, and all other kinds of theory. (*CW* 5, 53-4)

Leaving the real basis of history unexamined and undisturbed, the Young Hegelian ideology is as reactionary as Leopold von Ranke’s historiography⁵⁵³ when it studies an epoch merely in terms of its idealist expressions, such as political phrases, religious doctrines, or cultural traditions. Marx and Engels claim that, in doing so, the ideologists display an astonishing “credulity”: “The exponents of this conception of history have consequently only been able to see in history the spectacular political events and religious and other theoretical struggles, and in particular with regard to each historical epoch they were compelled to *share the illusion of that epoch*.” It appears that, from Marx and Engels’s perspective, philosophers should all become historians – but historians who look beneath religious and other ideal explanations for “scientific” explanations and refuse to transform “[t]he “fancy,” the “conception” of the people in question about their real practice . . . into the sole determining and effective force, which dominates and determines their practice” (*CW* 5, 55).

⁵⁵³ See marginal note by Marx, *CW* 5, 55, note *.

The credulity consists in the assumption that history can be divided into ages defined primarily by “belief systems.” Feuerbach, for example, argued that the age characterized by a belief in the “realm of God” would be replaced by an age characterized by a belief in the “realm of Man.” Marx and Engels argue that no realm of God has “ever existed anywhere save in the imagination” of the philosopher (*CW* 5, 56). This charge, as my own discussion of Feuerbach has shown, is somewhat harsh, especially since Feuerbach’s lasting contribution to critical theory was in fact his assertion of the anthropological basis of all ideal conceptions. However, Marx and Engels hold simply that the study of religion is not a study of society. Society cannot be explained in terms of religion. They say that, insofar as religion does play a certain role in people’s lives, it is not a historical force; rather, the people’s economic activities, interests, and struggles are. They add that religion has lost much of its significance with the rise of capitalism and modern industrial society:

The real, practice dissolution of these phrases, the removal of these notions from the consciousness of men, will . . . be effected by altered circumstances, not by theoretical deductions. For the mass of men, i.e., the proletariat, these theoretical notions do not exist and hence do not require to be dissolved, and if this mass ever had any theoretical notions, e.g., religion, these have now long been dissolved by circumstances.” (*CW* 5, 46)

It may, of course, be argued—and indeed it has been—that this assessment of the import of religion is seriously flawed. Cohen is only one of many Marxist theorists who have decried what they view as a severe oversight on the part of Marx. In his revisionist essay “Reconsidering Historical Materialism,” Cohen criticizes Marx for being “too materialist” and “excessive”⁵⁵⁴ and acknowledges that “[a] certain cliché of anti-Marxist thought is probably true, namely that Marx misjudged the significance of religion.”⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁴ Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*, 352.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 353.

While it is difficult to dispute the fact that large parts of the working class in the U.S. and elsewhere read little else apart from the Bible,⁵⁵⁶ I believe that it is useful to put Marx's claims about religion into their proper context. Marx was beginning to develop his theory of history as a materialist dialectic, expressed later with a more explicitly political meaning in the famous first line of *The Manifesto* as "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."⁵⁵⁷ This is no longer the Marx of the "Contribution to the Critique of Hegels' *Philosophy of Right*," where religion is said to be the "opiate of the masses." From this new vantage point, theoretico-religious notions are not relevant. This is to say that Marx's ideas about the role of religion are only flawed if one disagrees with his fundamental premises; they are not flawed if one views them from within his own materialist framework. This framework, as expounded in *The German Ideology*, is opposed to Feuerbach's critique of religion as false consciousness. Any critical standpoint that derives subjugation from religious and other ideals is therefore more properly Young Hegelian than Marxian.⁵⁵⁸

The conservative implications of the philosophy of consciousness are particularly apparent in Feuerbach's approach to the *concept* of communism. Not only false consciousness is conceived ideally, correct consciousness is also thought of abstractly. Feuerbach maintains that communism is a *theory* of human community-being. On these grounds, he argues that his own philosophy is communist. Marx and Engels, however, point out that communism is first and foremost a social movement, revolutionary practice. Feuerbach does not grasp communism as a political struggle resulting from certain economic conditions. Instead, he defines it as a universal essence that is inherent

⁵⁵⁶ See also Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2007).

⁵⁵⁷ Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*, 473.

⁵⁵⁸ However, one rather persuasive Marxist defense of the concept of false consciousness is Denise Meyerson's *False Consciousness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

in the human condition and outshines even the most wretched real-life conditions, which do not, therefore, need to be abolished. Hence, Marx and Engels point out “how grossly Feuerbach is deceiving himself when . . . by virtue of the qualification “common man” he declares himself a communist, transforms the latter into a predicate of “Man,” and thinks that it is thus possible to change the word “communist,” which in the real world means the follower of a definite revolutionary party, into a mere category” (*CW* 5, 57).

Communism, in other words, is not a philosophical idea but a set of revolutionary practices and actions.

Marx and Engels admit that Feuerbach knew that human life is social life and that social life is primarily about *relations*. However, they do not consider the mere knowledge of this fact “revolutionary”: “[H]e merely wants to produce a correct consciousness about an *existing* fact; whereas for the real Communist it is a question of overthrowing the existing state of things. We fully appreciate, however, that Feuerbach, in endeavouring to produce consciousness of just *this* fact, is going as far as a theorist possibly can, without ceasing to be a theorist and philosopher” (*ibid.*). Marx and Engels refer directly to Feuerbach’s *Philosophy of the Future* and argue that, in it, Feuerbach maintains that the determinate conditions of existence in which a person finds herself correspond to the person’s essence. When there is no such correspondence, this is only an unfortunate circumstance: “Here every exception is expressly conceived as an unhappy chance, as an abnormality which cannot be altered” (*CW* 5, 57). Marx has become critical of discourse that invokes a human “essence,” so he uses concrete language to illustrate what a lack of “satisfaction” (also Feuerbach’s term) means: “Thus if millions of proletarians feel by no means contented with their living conditions, if their “being” does

not in the least correspond to their “essence,” then . . . this is an unavoidable misfortune, which must be borne quietly” (ibid.). If the philosopher is reconciled with this situation, the proletariat is not: “These millions of proletarians or communists, however, think quite differently and will prove this in time, when they bring their ‘being’ into harmony with their ‘essence’ in a practical way, by means of a revolution” (*CW* 5, 58).

The term Marx and Engels use to describe the social discord is “contradiction,” and social contradictions, they argue, are systemic, not accidental. There is a fundamental similarity in the way that all Young Hegelians deal with contradiction, according to Marx and Engels. For example, Stirner’s approach is similar to Feuerbach’s. Where the latter portrays contradictions as “inevitable abnormalities,” the former “offers [the consolation] to the discontented, saying that this contradiction is their own contradiction and this predicament their own predicament, whereupon they should either set their minds at ease, keep their disgust to themselves, or revolt against it in some fantastic way” (*CW* 5, 59). Even Bauer’s philosophy is based on the same premise, that is, the “allegation that these unfortunate circumstances are due to the fact that those concerned are stuck in the muck of “substance,” have not advanced to “absolute self-consciousness,” and do not realise that these adverse conditions are spirit of their spirit” (ibid.).

The Ruling Ideas and the Ruling Class Ideas

According to the so-called “dominant ideology thesis,” Marx referred to the ideas of the ruling class when he spoke of ideology. The ruling class ideas, in this interpretation, are also the ruling ideas, i.e. the ideas that are dominant in a given epoch. The textual evidence used in support of this thesis is generally taken from a section of “I. Feuerbach”

([III]), which was originally part of the essay on Stirner. The short, often reproduced, segment on “The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas: How the Hegelian Conception of the Domination of the Spirit in History Arose” has invited the conclusion that since the bourgeoisie is the dominant class in capitalism, the ideas of the bourgeoisie are by definition ideological. Further, the argument goes, because bourgeois ideas tends to serve the interest of the bourgeoisie by legitimizing, universalizing, and naturalizing its rule, ideology is, in short, a ruling class apologia. While such conceptions of ideology are typically sophisticated approaches in political theory, they have been exceedingly schematic and have thus misconstrued Marx’s intentions.

As I have pointed out in the introduction, it is important to note, as Jorge Larraín has done, that the passage in question is not about ideology but about the ruling class ideas. However, Larraín has not acknowledged that it is just as important to understand the real connection between these two phenomena. In order to reconstruct this connection, we must first establish the meaning of the phrase “the ruling ideas”:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an historical epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. (*CW* 5, 59)

The passage states that the ruling class is the class that commands the productive forces. However, hegemony is exercised not only in the immediately economic realm but also,

by proxy, in the political, intellectual, and cultural realms. This is the extent of Marx and Engels's claims here.

The functionalist appropriations of these claims are not sustainable. Marx and Engels do not suggest here that the ruling class ideas integrate and reproduce the social and economic system by obfuscating the real contradictions and by reconciling the subjugated with their conditions. There can be no doubt that some ideas effectively conceal exploitation and that some ideas present the existing order as inexorable, but implications of this "injection model" (people are "injected" with narratives that pacify them) have been rightly criticized. For one thing, the problem is how a revolutionary consciousness could ever develop in this situation. Clearly, if the minds of the masses were wholly controlled by the ruling elite, the former would be too benighted to revolt against the latter to become agents of historical change. Furthermore, regardless of whether dominance in the symbolic sphere is conceived as a product of intentional deception or not, it is difficult to avoid the suggestion that people are mere puppets, dancing to the music of their master. Surely, it is not useful to think of workers as brainwashed automatons, who are completely mystified about their true conditions of existence and subscribe passively to distorted views of their reality.

With that said, the functionalist approach is problematic not because it is based on a faulty understanding of representation but because of its idealist underpinnings. The work of cultural studies was based to a large extent on the argument that domination in the field of representation does not entail a complete closure and that gaps and fissures in this field provided space for all kinds of symbolic resistance.⁵⁵⁹ While worthwhile, such

⁵⁵⁹ If the discipline of cultural studies has taught us anything, it is that there is a plethora of meanings and practices that confront and challenge the existing order. These symbolic forms of resistance may not be revolutionary but they may be anti-corporatist, anti-globalization, anti-war, anti-racist, feminist, and so on and so forth. However, how or whether they fit into the base-superstructure model is not clear.

criticism of ideology theory misfires with respect to Marx's ideology concept. This is because representations, however fascinating, do not determine historical developments on their own accord; that is, symbolic action can be subversive, but it does not bring about radical social change unless it is coupled with revolutionary activity, conceived strictly as the practical overthrow of the relations of production. Therefore, one can say that the ruling ideas rule only in the sense that they are an extension of the rule of the ruling class – not in the sense that they enslave people by holding their thoughts hostage. Put differently, it is the ruling *class* that rules in a class society, not the ideas of the ruling class.

Once the nature of the ruling ideas is clarified, it is possible to provide a final piece of evidence for our thesis that Marx and Engels's ideology critique was a critique of consciousness as a class phenomenon. To start, we will be able to confirm that *The German Ideology* is not simply about ruling class ideas, i.e. bourgeois notions and conceptions, but rather about philosophical idealism as a necessary product of a society characterized by alienated labor. As the following passage clarifies, Marx and Engels treat the ideologists as belonging to the ruling class and their critical philosophy of consciousness as an activity (though not a very "active" one) of the ruling class. This activity makes the connection between the ruling ideas and class structure disappear by erasing its material origin:

The division of labour . . . manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and material labour, so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the formation of the illusions of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood), while the others' attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves. Within this class this cleavage can even develop into a certain opposition and hostility between the two parts, but

whenever a practical collision occurs in which the class itself is endangered they automatically vanish, in which case there also vanishes the appearance of the ruling ideas being not the ideas of the ruling class and having a power distinct from the power of this class. (*CW* 5, 60)

When the thinkers come into conflict with the rest of the ruling class, they may become critical of the state and certain policies or lack thereof. For Marx and Engels, the Young Hegelian critique of the Restorationist regime constitutes an example of such a conflict. Of course, this position can, in principle, be maintained consistently. However, in the case of the Young Hegelians, Marx and Engels find that this is not true. Their opposition is only temporary and collapses as signs of serious stress arise, or it simply dies as suddenly as it appeared. Bauer's turn against the working people (or what he calls "the mass"/*die Masse*) may be seen as paradigmatic of this tendency. As long as their class position is not threatened, however, intellectuals are frequently portrayed, and like to portray themselves, as being autonomous and beyond class, and can take a position against the ruling class.

Just as the term "class consciousness" takes on an entirely new meaning with this alternative interpretation of *The German Ideology*, so does the notion of the semblance of independence. The ruling ideas are detached in the imagination from the ruling class, and as such they appear as self-sufficient entities to the ideologists.

If now in considering the course of history we detach the ideas of the ruling class from the ruling class itself and attribute to them an independent existence, if we confine ourselves to saying that these or those ideas were dominant at a given time, without bothering ourselves about the conditions of production and the producers of these ideas, if we thus ignore the individuals and world conditions which are the source of these ideas, then we can say, for instance, that during the time the aristocracy was dominant, the concepts honour, loyalty, etc., were dominant, during the dominance of the bourgeoisie the concepts freedom, equality, etc. The ruling class itself on the whole imagines this to be so.

One primary means by which ruling class ideas are represented as independent is the conversion of particular interests into supposedly general interests. There is a distinction here, however, between the philosophical operation that turns bourgeois “doctrines” into “eternal laws” (*CW* 5, 59) on the one hand and the *necessary* historical correspondence between particular interests and general interests on the other hand. The latter works like this: When a class comes to power, it legitimizes its struggle for dominance by claiming that its rule will benefit all of society. This is not calculated fraud; rather, the particular interests of this revolutionary class really are the general interests of society – until, that is, the new ruling class ceases to be a liberatory force and becomes an oppressive force. However, there is another aspect to the transformation of the historically concrete into a transhistorical abstraction. It is the progressive universalization of interests through time. The proletariat, because its wants to abolish class society as such, is in the unique position to bring about the final coincidence of special interests and the common interest.

This phenomenon is described by Marx and Engels as the process by which universality is historically emergent: “[E]ver more abstract ideas hold sway, i.e., ideas which increasingly take on the form of universality” (*CW* 5, 61). This is not a postulate without materialist foundation; rather, Marx and Engels explain universal abstraction as a result of concrete class interest: “For each new class which puts itself in the place of the one ruling before it is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to present its interests as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones” (ibid.). This is not merely a political strategy; rather, it is based on actual historical development: “The class making a revolution comes forward

from the very start, if only because it is opposed to a *class*, not as a class but as the representative of the whole of society, as the whole mass of society confronting the one ruling class. It can do this because initially its interest really is as yet mostly connected with the common interest of all other non-ruling classes” (ibid.).

This is not an empty assertion on Marx and Engels’s part; rather, they explain that the call for freedom is initially a general call for the end of oppression. Only with the crystallization of a new ruling class does this class develop class interests that are distinct from those whom it oppresses in its turn, in other words, at first, “its interest has not yet been able to develop as the particular interest of a particular class. Its victory, therefore, benefits also many individuals of other classes which are not winning a dominant position, but only insofar as it now enables these individuals to raise themselves into the ruling class” (*CW* 5, 61). This, finally, is not an eternal process; for, if it were, history would be turning its wheels without actually moving. Marx and Engels argue, then, that class interests are not just particular; they are also universal – but in a very concrete sense. The example that Marx and Engels use is that of the French Revolution: “When the French bourgeoisie overthrew the rule of the aristocracy, it thereby made it possible for many proletarians to raise themselves above the proletariat, but only insofar as they became bourgeois. Every new class, therefore, achieves domination only on a broader basis than that of the class ruling previously” (ibid.).

If class conflict does not persist forever, it is because class struggle becomes ever more far-reaching. In Marx and Engels’ words, “the opposition of the non-ruling class to the new ruling class then develops all the more sharply and profoundly. Both these things determine the fact that the struggle to be waged against this new ruling class, in its turn,

has as its aim a more decisive and more radical negation of the previous conditions of society than all previous classes which sought to rule could have” (*CW* 5, 61). The point of the argument about the historical realization of the universal is that once social interests are no longer particular to classes, ruling class ideas will no longer exist and neither will the notion that the ruling class is in power because its ideas are in power: “This whole appearance, that the rule of a certain class is only the rule of certain ideas, comes to a natural end, of course, as soon as class rule in general ceases to be the form in which society is organised, that is to say, as soon as it is no longer necessary to represent a particular interest as general or the ‘general interest’ as ruling” (*CW* 5, 61).

The real coincidence of the particular and the universal is distorted in the idealist conception of history. Marx and Engels claim that real universality is a fact of history that historiography “will necessarily come up against” (*CW* 5, 60). Philosophy, however, ignores the underlying material developments and imagines that the unity of the abstract and the concrete is a *causa sui*. What, to Marx and Engels, is an expression of the rise of the universal class is to the Young Hegelians the expression of a higher essence objectifying itself in the world. *Geschichtsphilosophie* (ibid., 61), as opposed to historical science, thus empties history of its material content: “[T]he ruling ideas have been separated from the ruling individuals and, above all, from the relations which result from a given stage of the mode of production, and in this way the conclusion has been reached that history is always under the sway of ideas” (ibid.). This, in turn, leads straight back to the Hegelian subjectivization of ideal entities: “[I]t is very easy to abstract from these various ideas ‘the Idea,’ the thought, etc., as the dominant force in history, and thus to consider all these separate ideas and concepts as ‘forms of self-determination’ of the

Concept developing in history” (ibid.). In other words, the idealist notion of ruling ideas always comes back to the philosophy of the Idea.

Even materialists like Stirner and Feuerbach, who reject the theological implications of Hegel’s *Weltgeist*, posit bourgeois concepts such as “Man” or “the Unique” as general interests without acknowledging their crass contradiction with the reality of the majority of people. While more universal than the interests of any other ruling class prior to the rise of capitalism, bourgeois interests are still starkly particular in that they are the realization of *Man as property owner* whose existence depends on the expropriation of the masses. The bourgeoisie, in other words, is not the universal class, as the Young Hegelians assume.

The upshot of the Young Hegelians’ critical logic is that, because ideas have ruled over people, philosophers have ruled over society. There is irony in the notion that “theorists, ideologists, and philosophers . . . the thinkers as such, have at all times been dominant in history” (*CW* 5, 62). The notion is both true and false. It is true because theorists, ideologists, and philosophers tend to be members of the dominant class. It is also false, however, because the mode of this domination is material, not ideal. The ideologists are therefore simultaneously revealing and concealing their own liminal position as the “passive” members of the dominant class. There is, however, at least one reason why the very notion of the ruling class is problematic. To clarify this, we must note that the productive forces that “actively” bring about historical development include not only capital (or what Marx later calls “constant capital” or “dead labor”) but, far more importantly, class struggle. This means that the class that rules at a particular moment will not bring about a radical historical transformation because it is interested in

maintaining its dominance. Hence, the oppressed classes that become revolutionary forces are also dominant but in a different way: they are the forces that govern historical change. One might therefore say that inasmuch as the Young Hegelians were convinced of the dominance of the thinker in history, just as Hegel had attributed special powers to the philosopher (and extraordinarily special powers to himself), they were doubly mistaken about the nature of this dominance.

Ideologists, as I have already remarked, are not necessarily philosophers. There is a broader sense in which Marx and Engels use the term “ideologist” to apply also to other “thinkers” within the ruling class: “This historical method which reigned in Germany, and especially the reason why, must be explained from its connection with the illusion of ideologists in general, e.g., the illusions of the jurists, politicians (including the practical statesmen), from the dogmatic dreamings and distortions of these fellows” (*CW* 5, 62) (*CW* 5, 62). What they share in common is a certain kind of profession – one that is based on ideas. These professions, unlike, say that of “every shopkeeper,” come with what one might call an “occupational hazard,” idealism. As is the case with the philosopher, the generic ideologist’s naïveté stems directly from his limited activity, i.e., his preoccupation with ideas. Their illusions, then, are “explained perfectly easily from their practical position in life, their job, and the division of labor” (*ibid.*). The “ideological professions,”⁵⁶⁰ as conceived by Marx and Engels, are thus the caste of professionals who deal in the production and propagation of ideas. Like philosophers, jurists and politicians look at ideas as though they had a history of their own and as though they were detached

⁵⁶⁰ Marx uses this term in a marginal note in the context of a discussion of the rise of the bourgeoisie to power. Marx’s use of the “±” indicates that by ideology in the strict sense he means idealist philosophy and that he uses the term also to refer in a more general sense to all other professions occupied with ideas.

from real relations.⁵⁶¹ Because the very activity of intellectuals predisposes them to these illusions and fantasies, the “tricks” that ideology plays are built into the situation in which it finds itself, which is to say that the ideologists are really the ones who are being played.

In an attempt to sketch the outlines of a correct, non-ideological approach to history, Marx and Engels close the “introduction” with a variety of materialist concepts that are picked up by Marx later, most notably in *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. As if to reinforce the central importance of the concept of the division of labor in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels offer a (very cursory) overview of the history of the division of labor from the separation of town and country (i.e. production and intercourse [meaning trade and commerce]) to the rise of the manufactures (which replaced the medieval guilds). Further, they tentatively gesture towards the specificity of capitalism as a particular kind of class society by addressing the rise of movable capital and the big bourgeoisie. They go on to treat briefly the emergence of the international market, the increasing importance of money, colonialism, and the transformation of all capital into industrial capital. All of these ideas are developed in Marx’s later work. One point that reappears in *The Communist Manifesto* is the argument that, with the advent of world history, the dynamics of material production themselves reveal the fact that the independence of ideas is a semblance only. There, Marx and Engels say: “All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at least compelled to face with

⁵⁶¹ One contemporary example might be the anti-Affirmative Action argument that the principle of “equal opportunity” must be upheld regardless of economic inequality.

sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.”⁵⁶² Already in *The German Ideology*, they maintain quite similarly that “[b]y universal competition, it [capital] forced all individuals to strain their energy to the utmost. It destroyed as far as possible ideology, religion, morality, etc., and, where it could not do this, made them into a palpable lie” (*CW* 5, 73). In the final instance, as this passage suggests, the abolition of ideology is prepared through the progressive transformation of all activity into productive labor.

At the same time, Marx and Engels stress even in this fragmented section of the text that the dialectic of history is always a result of social contradictions. This is important because it underscores the fact that *The German Ideology* does not base its theory of historical change on the productive moment but rather on the tension between the productive forces and the relations of production: “all collisions in history have their origin, according to our view, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse” (*CW* 5, 74). But the roots of struggle are economic. To forget the primacy of the economic is to slip into ideology:

The contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse, which, as we saw, has occurred several times in past history, without, however, endangering its basis, necessarily on each occasion burst out in a revolution, taking on at the same time various subsidiary forms, such as all-embracing collisions, collisions of various classes, contradictions of consciousness, battle of ideas, political struggle, etc. From a narrow point of view one may isolate one of these subsidiary forms and consider it as the basis of these revolutions; and this is all the more easy as the individuals who started the revolutions had illusions about their own activity according to their degree of culture and the stage of historical development. (*Ibid.*)

It is also important to note that contradiction does not automatically erupt into collision.

The German Ideology makes a consistently strong case for the historical necessity of a

⁵⁶² Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*, 476.

communist proletarian movement. However, they do not claim that such a movement comes about easily or immediately. To the contrary, overcoming alienation is a lengthy and difficult process:

Competition separates individuals from one another, not only the bourgeois but still more the workers, in spite of the fact that it brings them together. Hence it is a long time before these individuals can unite . . . Hence every organised power standing over against these isolated individuals, who live in conditions daily reproducing this isolation, can only be overcome after long struggles. To demand the opposite would be tantamount to demanding that competition should not exist in this definite epoch of history, or that the individuals should banish from their minds conditions over which in their isolation they have no control. (Ibid., 75)

In discussing the conditions of revolutionary change, Marx and Engels set up their confrontation with Stirner who denies the possibility of a *social* revolution insofar as he denies the reality of class. Marx and Engels argue that class both makes the end of alienation possible and constitutes the essence of alienation itself:

The separate individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class; in other respects they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors. On the other hand, the class in its turn assumes an independent existence as against the individuals, so that the latter find their conditions predetermined, and have their position in life and hence their personal development assigned to them by their class, thus subsumed under it. This is the same phenomenon as the subjection of the separate individuals to the division of labour and can only be removed by the abolition of private property and of labour itself. (Ibid.)

Class cannot be mediated, Marx and Engels add against Young Hegelian ideology, by affirmations about a shared participation in the progress of “humanity.” Progress may be taking place, but classes are not equally imperfect manifestations of a basic commonality, an identity whose destiny is perfection. The problem is described by Marx and Engels as follows:

If this development of individuals, which proceeds within the common conditions of existence of estates and classes, historically following one another, and the general conceptions thereby forced upon them—if this development is considered

from a *philosophical* point of view, it is certainly very easy to imagine that in these individuals the species, or man, has evolved, or that they evolved man—and in this way one can give history some hard clouts on the ear. One can then conceive these various estates and classes to be specific terms of the general expression, subordinate varieties of the species, or evolutionary phrases of man. (*CW* 5, 77)

The subordination of individuals is absolute and cannot be trivialized by way of uplifting talk about unity or, its twin, individualism. Progress instead must be understood as a painful process of overcoming structures of domination. The kind of domination that must be overcome is not that of ideas but of alienated circumstances. The vector of determination begins with the social conditions that are beyond the individual's will. However, the individual's will to remove these conditions is just as determined by his or her situation, and that will in turn determines the course of history. Objectivity and subjectivity, therefore, are not opposed. As Marx and Engels express this relationship,

For the proletarians . . . the condition of their life, labour, and with it all the conditions of existence of modern society, have become something extraneous, something over which they, as separate individuals, have no control. The contradiction between the individuality of each separate proletarian and labour, the condition of life forced upon him, becomes evident to him, for he is sacrificed from youth onwards and, within his own class, has no chance of arriving at the conditions which would place him in the other class. (*CW* 5, 79)

But alienation is also, more specifically, the product of the division of labor, which cannot be dissolved as dreams are dissolved when we wake up: "The transformation, through the division of labour, of personal powers (relations) into material powers, cannot be dispelled by dismissing the general idea of it from one's mind, but can only be abolished by the individuals again subjecting these material powers to themselves and abolishing the division of labour" (*ibid.*, 78).

The individual in whose name the revolution bursts forth is, finally, not an ideal that is waiting to become actual. Rather, classes are made up of individuals who may be

alienated but are nonetheless real. Ideology ignores the historical character of individuality. The history of individuals is not the product of an “evolutionary process of consciousness” (*CW* 5, 89). It only appears to be that way when “the average individual of the later stage was always foisted on to the earlier stage, and the consciousness of a later age on to the individuals of an earlier” (*ibid.*). Unlike Stirner, who maintains that individuals have to proceed from themselves, Marx and Engels claim that “[i]ndividuals have always proceeded from themselves, but of course from themselves within their given historical conditions and relations, not from the ‘pure’ individual in the sense of the ideologists” (*CW* 5, 78). They may have been exploited, but they were individuals nonetheless. Personality is caught in a fundamental split; there is a cleavage between the “private individual” and the “class individual” (*ibid.*, 78), but, insofar as Hegelian and post-Hegelian philosophy recognizes this cleavage, it takes it to be a matter of false consciousness when in truth, as Marx and Engels put it, “[t]he difference between the individual as a person and whatever is extraneous to him is not a conceptual difference but a historical fact” (*ibid.*, 81). Individuals, having been “robbed of all real life-content” and having thus become “abstract individuals,” must reappropriate what has been wrested from them – the products of their labor – through the “transformation of labour into self-activity” (*ibid.*, 88). According to Marx and Engels, this is the point when “self-activity coincide[s] with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals. . . . With the appropriation of the total productive forces by the united individuals, private property comes to an end. Whilst previously in history a particular condition always appeared as accidental, now the isolation of individuals and each person’s particular way of gaining his livelihood have themselves become

accidental (ibid.). If, in other words, the notion that history (or pre-history) is the struggle of individuals for liberation is something that Marx had in common with the Young Hegelian, there is a significant difference in the process of liberation is conceived, and this difference must be adequately accounted for.

To sum up, “I. Feuerbach,” written for the most part in the summer of 1846, after Marx and Engels had given up their publication plans for the quarterly and tried instead (but failed) to publish the review of Stirner, the short response to Bauer, and the essays on the True Socialists in book form, frames Marx and Engels’s last sustained confrontation with the Young Hegelians with a general critique of mental labor. In a set of notes that accompany “I. Feuerbach”⁵⁶³ and probably served as an outline for the clean copy, Marx and Engels offer a recap of their concept of ideology. First, Marx writes that “[t]here is no history of politics, law, science, etc., of art, religion, etc.” (*CW* 5, 92) and hence confirms that not only philosophers but also “clerics, jurists, politicians” can be considered ideologists in the broadest sense. Then, Marx poses the question of “*Why the ideologists turn everything upside-down*” (ibid.) and answers it as follows: “*The occupation assumes an independent existence owing to division of labour*. Everyone believes his craft to be the true one. Illusions regarding the connection between their craft and reality are the more likely to be cherished by them because of the very nature of the craft” (ibid.). They continue, “In consciousness – in jurisprudence, politics, etc. – relations become concepts; since they do not go beyond these relations, the concepts of the relations also become fixed concepts in their mind. The judge, for example, applies the code, he therefore regards legislation as the real, active driving force. Respect for

⁵⁶³ While the prepublication of the MEGA 1 version of *The German Ideology* does not include these notes in the text itself, the *CW* do. There, they follow the only sub-section in the manuscripts that was titled by Marx and Engels (“The relation of state and law to property”).

their goods, because their craft deals with general matters” (ibid.). It is, therefore, clear that the philosophers’ preoccupation with ideas is a direct result of their occupation.

This explicit identification of idealist distortion and exclusively mental occupations is fully in line with my discussion of *The German Ideology* so far. A coherent application of this conceptual principle can help us sort out even difficult problems such as Marx and Engels’s complex use of the term “consciousness.” Marx writes, for example, “Idea of law. Idea of state. The matter is turned upside-down in *ordinary* consciousness” (ibid.). What he means by “ordinary consciousness”⁵⁶⁴ here can only be ascertained by way of relating it to the overall arguments laid out in *The German Ideology*. In doing so, we can conclude that Marx does not refer to communism as a form of consciousness here. Nor does he refer to people’s everyday ideas about, say, how to sew a button on a shirt. Nor does he refer to the entire range of ruling class ideas. Rather, he has in mind the “ordinary” notions of thinkers whose practical limitations lead them to imbue the products of their “craft” with extra-ordinary meaning. That is, for the philosopher, as for the cleric and all other ideologists, “all real relations become ideas.”⁵⁶⁵ In other words, ideology is “from the outset *consciousness of the transcendental* arising from *actually existing* forces” (ibid., 93). One example of such ordinary consciousness is Max Stirner’s *The Ego*, and it is this text to which Marx and Engels devote most of their elaborations on ideology.

⁵⁶⁴ The expression also occurs elsewhere in the text (*CW* 5, 134). It is noteworthy that the expression is placed in quotation marks in this second instance.

⁵⁶⁵ This is a marginal note in a different part of the manuscript (*CW* 5, 91).

CHAPTER 6

Fool or Charlatan: The Conjuring Tricks of “Saint Max”

In the next two chapters, I aim to make the following points: First, I will continue to demonstrate that the first step toward a just and useful interpretation of *The German Ideology* is the clearing away of the common prejudice that the text is an exemplar of crude scientism, an assault on mediation through consciousness. Second, I will show that the next step in producing a correct reading of *The German Ideology* is the recognition that such a reading must be based on the premise that we are dealing with a rhetorically inflated critique of the philosophy of consciousness. Third, I explain that it is critical to understand Stirner’s critique of idealism before we can hope to understand Marx’s critique of Stirner; for this purpose, I read parts of *The Ego* alongside “Saint Max.”

The illustration and explanation of the philosophical tendency toward idealism is the central aim of Marx and Engels’s discussion of Stirner, and it is also the focus of this chapter. Therefore, I will provide an in-depth discussion of the “conjuring tricks” Marx and Engels attribute to Young Hegelian philosophy *qua* mental labor. The trick of affixing transcendent meaning to contingent events, to fetishize ideas as Spirit (i.e. to imagine spirit as appearing out of nothing and living an independent life), and to systematically occlude the social contradictions that drive history are only a few examples of the philosophical *Eskamotagen* (conjuring tricks) that Marx and Engels

analyze and renounce. The careful analysis of Marx and Engels's arguments will provide further confirmation that the ideological instance was for Marx and Engels directly tied up with, because conceptually opposed to, the theory of revolutionary practice. The discovery, discussed in even greater detail in the final chapter of this dissertation, that Marx and Engels are setting up ideology against the lived struggle for historical transformation, corrects a common misunderstanding in the literature on Marx and critical Marxist theory. I will present Marx and Engels's critique of ideology as a materialist account of the philosophical deflection of questions of revolutionary agency away from actual praxis into the murky realm of absolute consciousness. While Marx and Engels sketch out these arguments in "I. Feuerbach," they discussed them in more detail, and illustrated them with examples in "III. Saint Max."

Problems of Interpretation and Authorial Intent

Chapter "III. Saint Max" has continued to resist interpretation due to the difficulty to disentangle the two antagonists. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida sums up the currently prevalent view of *The German Ideology* when he says that the critique of Stirner is "verbose and sometimes vertiginous" and that it "sets heads spinning."⁵⁶⁶ However, while many Marxists have found the density and intensity of "Saint Max" reason enough for ignoring it, Derrida at least begins to read Marx's detailed discussion of Stirner's *Ego*.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 127.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 139. One notable recent exception to the general neglect is the article by Robert Kaufman titled "Red Kant, or the Persistence of the Third 'Critique' in Adorno and Jameson (*Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Summer, 2000), 682-724. Discussing *The German Ideology*, Kaufman questions whether Marx and Engels ever intended a critique of idealism as such. While Kaufman's attempt to reconcile the text with Kantian idealism is not completely persuasive, the article contains a useful discussion of the literary, and specifically satiric, form of the work. Another exception is the little book by Jerome McGann called *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). McGann

More than that, Derrida is interested in the relation between “Saint Max” and Marx, sensing the pivotal role the former played in the latter’s development. Unfortunately, Derrida represents this role in psychological rather than theoretical terms. In the essay “Apparition of the Inapparent,” Derrida claims that Marx’s “relentless pursuit” of Stirner signals a resemblance between the two “to the point that we could mistake one for the other.” He even asserts that Marx is almost “a brother, a double . . . [,] a diabolical image” of Stirner.⁵⁶⁸ For Derrida, Marx’s intervention is hardly more than a superiority in playing the game of ghost-seeing, of spotting specters that are trying to pass as real bodies: “What Stirner and Marx seem to have in common is the critique of the ghostly. Both of them aim at some reappropriation of life in a body proper. . . . But whereas Stirner seems to entrust this reappropriation to a simple conversion of the self that *takes back into itself* . . . Marx, for his part, denounces this egological body: there, he cries, is the ghost of all ghosts!”⁵⁶⁹

If the qualitative rupture that Marx makes is not recognized, his reading of Stirner appears excessive and absurd. To wit, Derrida is fascinated most with what he describes as Marx’s supposedly sadomasochistic obsession with (his own) ghosts. The content of Marx’s critique of Stirner’s phenomenological reduction is thus submerged under the image of a haunted Marx, a neurotic Marx, a Marx in thrall with his specters. Even though Derrida acknowledges that there is a difference between Stirner’s philosophy and Marx’s anti-philosophy, he is more concerned with the similarities. Thus, he posits that

explains in his “Afterword: The German Ideology Once Again” that *The German Ideology* is a brilliant critique of the “infantile disorder” of left-wing Hegelianism (153). In his own critique of Althusser, Macherey, and Eagleton, McGann notes further that the work’s relevance for contemporary Marxist criticism lies in the reminder that there is no excuse for the false privileging of critical consciousness and its activities (ibid., 159).

⁵⁶⁸ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 127.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 161-2.

Marx “is bound to it [his victim Stirner] in a troubling fashion.”⁵⁷⁰ Derrida describes Marx as envious of Stirner (and his discovery of the spectral), as captivated by the chase, as compulsively counting ghosts he knows are not countable, as mimicking Stirner’s moves by using the latter’s weapons against him, and as being just as occupied with the ideal as Stirner. Derrida’s charge is that Marx remains trapped with Stirner in a romantic-pathological desire for a world without specters, i.e. in an “ontology of presence.”⁵⁷¹

To gloss over the fact that Stirner’s philosophy is in many ways much closer to postmodern theories both of discourse and of the body than Marx’s theory of the primacy of economic reality can result in an anachronistic critique of *The German Ideology*. Such can be said to be the case with Derrida, according to whom chapter three of *The German Ideology* is a paradigmatic case of the positivist struggle against difference.⁵⁷² What Derrida misses, however, is that spectrality is not the same thing for Marx that it is for the deconstructionists.⁵⁷³ In Marx, and especially *The German Ideology*, spectrality has little relation to the contemporary doctrine of the representational nature of human existence but is rather, as I have argued, about the specific conditions and results of mental labor. Just as the notion of the ineluctability of inherently indeterminate signs and symbolic operations was not Marx’s concern, so the Kantian notion that behind this reality there lies, forever hidden away, a forever inaccessible Real, the “Ding-an-sich,” had nothing to do with Marx’s emerging materialism.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ For a discussion of this thesis, see *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx* (London: Verso, 1999) with essays by Antonio Negri, Slavoj Žižek, Fredric Jameson, and Terry Eagleton.

⁵⁷² Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 177.

⁵⁷³ That there is a tension between ‘discourse’ and ‘ideology’ has been recognized by sociologists Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt, for instance, who argue nonetheless that the different theoretical legacies of the two concepts can be put into a productive conversation with each other. See “Discourse, ideology, discourse, ideology, discourse, ideology ...,” *British Journal of Sociology* 44, 3 (September 1993): 473-499.

Further, to argue that Marx's ideas in 1845/46 essentially amounted to a philosophy of facticity and to an effort to shoehorn social theory into the scientific method is to miss the obvious: that Marx was not afraid of philosophy or consciousness but wanted to explain them historically. Therefore, it is unfair and ineffective to ascribe to Marx the belief, as Derrida does, that the purpose of critique is to arrive at this Real, the pure object, the naked empirical truth free from culture and language. The real that *is* the object of Marx's materialist approach is one that is necessarily mediated, namely through social structures and relations.⁵⁷⁴ Indeed, it is precisely the disavowal of such mediations that constitutes the target of Marx and Engels's attack in *The German Ideology*. Especially in the chapter on Stirner, Marx wants to show that there is no such thing as pure objectivity or subjectivity and that such myths, which Derrida attributes to Marx, can be explained in terms of class division and economic relations. By the same token, Derrida's notion that representations are ubiquitous and all-powerful is precisely the view that Marx criticized.

In order to avoid misreading (or underreading) "III. Saint Max" by applying poststructuralist categories onto the text, we must premise our analysis on an understanding that historical materialism is not in fact a mad fantasy and that Marx and Engels were doing something more than giving an "inexhaustible gloss on this [Stirner's] table of ghosts"⁵⁷⁵, something more than another instance of "ghostwriting."⁵⁷⁶ And in order to get at this "something more," we shall have to allow ourselves to be pulled into

⁵⁷⁴ Terry Eagleton has pointed out that this is precisely the reason why "Marx can call for a sensuously based science without lapsing into commonplace empiricism, it is because the senses for him are less some isolable region, whose 'laws' might then be rationally inspected. . . . Sense perception for Marx is in the first place the constitutive structure of human practice, rather than a set of contemplative organs" (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1990], 199).

⁵⁷⁵ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 178.

⁵⁷⁶ See Gayatri Spivak, "Ghostwriting," *Diacritics*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Summer, 1995): 65-84.

the tight-knit arguments that Marx develops in his critique of Stirner. If we hope to comprehend what exactly Marx was grappling with when he responded to *Ego*, we must examine both Stirner's ideas and Marx's refutations of them in detail and engage the questions that animated Marx's final extended commentary on post-Hegelian philosophy. At the risk of inviting the same criticisms that *The German Ideology* has been subjected to, I must, therefore, reconstruct the various points of debate between Marx and Engels on the one hand and Stirner on the other, one by one, and with particular attention to the main problem posed by Marx and Engels: namely when, how, and why ostensibly materialist ideas turn speculative and metaphysical. In spite of Derrida, I shall thus try to enumerate some of the conjuring tricks of ideology and interpret Marx's account of their nature and origin.

If, in our study of Marx's 1845/46 position *vis-à-vis* the Young Hegelians, we privilege what should be regarded the center piece of *The German Ideology*, we can see immediately that the Marxian critique of ideology was an attempt to extend and to exceed the Young Hegelian critique of idealism. That "III. Saint Max" is indeed the glue that holds the manuscript together is apparent from the fact that it is the longest section of what is left of the planned first volume of Marx and Engels's quarterly journal. In marked contrast to "II. Saint Bruno," the essay "III. Saint Max" is over 300 pages in standard editions. The two chapters are preceded by a brief introductory section titled "The Leipzig Council," which makes an ironic reference to the city where the works of Bauer and Stirner were published.⁵⁷⁷ In this prologue, Marx and Engels explicitly frame their critique of the Young Hegelians as a critique of idealist philosophy. They do this by

⁵⁷⁷ The city of Leipzig, which is located in Saxony, did not have as strict a policy of censorship as Prussia, and publisher Otto Wigand was able to print the writings of a number of Young Hegelian radicals (as well as a number of moderates) in the *Deutsche Jahrbücher für Kunst und Wissenschaft* and the *Wigand'sche Vierteljahrsschrift*.

turning the critique of religion against itself, comparing post-Hegelian radical theory directly to the theology it had aimed to surpass.

“The Leipzig Council” clearly functions as yet another summary of Marx and Engels’s negative perspective on German criticism. Marx and Engels announce that it is their intention to show that neither Bauer nor avowed anti-idealist Stirner were successful in shedding the skin of Hegel’s theologically inflected idealism and that the “Leipzig book fair” and its participants’ “mutual quarrels” represent a regression to the most traditional kind of philosophy. Hence, they introduce Bauer and Stirner as “Saint Bruno” and “Saint Max” and declare, “We are attending a council of church fathers,” which is fighting a “holy war,” a war that “is not a battle over earthly things . . . but [a battle] in the name of the most sacred interests of the spirit, in the name of ‘substance’, ‘self-consciousness’, ‘criticism’, ‘the ‘unique’ and the ‘true man’.”⁵⁷⁸ If, in “I. Feuerbach,” they pronounced the rotten state of the “various components of this *caput mortuum* [of Hegelian philosophy]” (*CW* 5, 27), they now set out to demonstrate that Stirner and Bauer are among “the last specimens of their kind” insofar as, in their philosophical exertions, “the cause of the Most High, alias the Absolute, is being pleaded for the last time” (*ibid.*, 94).

Marx and Engels’s continued loyalty to Feuerbach indicates that, while sorting out the differences between one set of materialist ideas from another, they were not willing to give up their allegiance to the Feuerbachian approach over and against that offered by Stirner. Thus, they immediately move to clarify that Feuerbach, whose abstract humanism had obvious pitfalls, was nevertheless a clear advance over Hegel and that his materialism paved the way for a true science of history. Bauer and Stirner, on the

⁵⁷⁸ *CW* 5, 94; hereafter cited parenthetically.

other hand, are, according to Marx and Engels, pathetic remnants of a pre-Feuerbachian moment; their approaches, far from going beyond Feuerbach, are even more abstract and metaphysical. Marx and Engels unequivocally side with Feuerbach when they argue that Bauer falls back behind Feuerbach in his sarcastic remark that the “heretic” “is in possession of *hyle* [matter] . . . [, keeps it] under lock and key and refuses to hand it over” – to “self-consciousness” (*CW* 5, 95). Marx and Engels find Stirner’s critique of Feuerbach’s concept of ‘Man’ wanting, to say the least; thus, they caricature Stirner as saying that there is no difference between humans and animals, that human beings are essentially like ““every goose, every dog, every horse”” (ibid.).

In their defense of Feuerbach, Marx and Engels state (and likely overstate) their case by portraying Stirner and Bauer as literally wanting to initiate a return to theology. They purposely exaggerate the quasi-religious tenets of Bauerian and Stirnerian ideology by describing the two philosophers as bearing “halos” and serving the “Kingdom of God” (*CW* 5, 94-95). Further, by referring to Bauer and Stirner as the “two grand masters of the Holy Inquisition” (ibid., 95), they construct a fault line between Feuerbach, the materialist, and Stirner/Bauer, the last crusaders of traditional metaphysics. As my discussion of Bauer of the place of *The German Ideology* in Marx’s work indicates, this characterization cannot be taken a face value, but there is no reason to assume that Marx and Engels were ignorant of the one-sidedness of their representation. Especially in the case of Stirner, Marx and Engels must have been conscious of the fact that his attack on Feuerbach was fundamentally correct. And yet, despite their inclusion of Feuerbach in their own critique of the Young Hegelians, Marx and Engels support Feuerbach against

Bauer and Stirner—perhaps because they are not ready to admit the full extent to which they themselves have come to reject the ahistorical humanism of Feuerbach.

The polemical function of the text is patently obvious in “II. Saint Bruno” and “III. Saint Max.” It is evident that Marx and Engels not only strategically collapsed the differences between Bauer and Stirner, and thereby obscured the fact that Stirner’s devastating critique of Bauer⁵⁷⁹ coincided closely with their own attack on Bauer, they also erased all traces of their own Young Hegelian past and refused to give Stirner due credit for at least partially prompting their own departure from Feuerbach. In retrospect, we may wonder why Marx and Engels concealed the decidedly anti-idealist impetus behind Stirner’s intervention so systematically, but the answer is clearly to be found in the rhetorical intentions Marx and Engels had in writing these essays. The idea was to challenge, to provoke, and to amplify, in order to illustrate a particular problem. The problem they wanted to illustrate was that the critical “reductions” of Hegel that were based on a philosophy of consciousness, no matter how secular, were unable to escape the spider web of idealist misperceptions, and they used hyperbole as a means for this illustration.

The literature on *The German Ideology* has often pointed out that there is a paradox at the heart of the text: If Marx and Engels really thought that their antagonists had nothing interesting or important to say, why did they spend so much time debunking their ideas? The polemical stance of the work provides only half the solution. The other half is surely that Marx and Engels were only in the *process* of working through their differences with these German philosopher critics. By painstakingly refuting their

⁵⁷⁹ For a systematic analysis of Stirner’s critique of Hegel and Bauerian Hegelianism, see De Ridder’s recent article “Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians: A Reassessment,” *History of European Ideas* 34, no. 3 (2008): 285-297.

arguments, Marx and Engels were performing their break with the Young Hegelians. Thus, they project and anticipate a sharp separation that emerges precisely in the moment of its enunciation. An example of this act of “doing things with words”⁵⁸⁰ is the end of “The Leipzig Council” where the authors sarcastically remark that the two “saints” critique of Moses Hess and Bauer’s critique of Marx and Engels’s *The Holy Family* are irrelevant because they miss the point of critical practice: “But as these accused have been busying themselves with ‘worldly affairs’ and, therefore, have failed to appear before the Santa Casa, they are sentenced in their absence to eternal banishment from the realm of the spirit for the term of their natural life” (*CW* 5, 96). Here, Marx and Engels declare that they have already left the room, so to speak, and exited the fruitless philosophical crusades of their former associates, when they are in fact appearing before the “Santa Casa” one last time. But while they have not closed the door yet, *The German Ideology* is the means by which they effectively do so and accomplish their break with the Young Hegelians. And the occasion for this break was Max Stirner’s *magnum opus*, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*.

A thorough appreciation of Marx and Engels’s critique of Stirner must not, of course, lead us to dismiss Stirner’s work outright, without careful consideration. Moreover, a careful consideration of Stirner’s work on its own terms requires that we place it in its historical context. When it appeared at the end of 1844 (rather than 1845, which is the date printed on the book), Stirner’s *Ego* made quite a splash, and, given the intensity of the Young Hegelian discourse at that time, it is no surprise that Marx and Engels would read it. Engels was impressed with it at first and commended it for its profundity of insight; subsequently, however, he changed his mind and agreed with the

⁵⁸⁰ Austin, J.L., *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

unfavorable judgment of Marx.⁵⁸¹ However, as the following elaborations will emphasize, Engels's initial praise is not without merit. *Ego* really was an important work and must be regarded as such. A discussion of *The German Ideology* cannot, therefore, do without a consideration of the radical impact of Stirner's ideas. This is especially the case since the book itself is not read much today, outside a small circle of anarchists and existentialists. However, while Stirner is now viewed mostly as a starting point of the tradition of thought that was to culminate in the work of Nietzsche⁵⁸², Stirner's significance in the 1840s consisted in the fact that he issued a fundamental challenge to the whole gamut of radical thinkers at the time and changed the terms of the debate by proposing a new way to think about material existence.

Compared to Feuerbach and Bauer, Johann Kaspar Schmidt (1806-1856), *alias* Stirner, has not attracted a lot of attention.⁵⁸³ Having attended Hegel's lectures in Berlin, Stirner joined The Free in 1841, but beyond his main work *Der Einzige*, which was originally translated as *The Unique and His Property*,⁵⁸⁴ he did not produce much else of

⁵⁸¹ As Lobkowitz remarks, Marx had been asked to write a review of *Ego* in December of 1844, but Marx was not quite ready to do so, saying that it was "impossible" ("Karl Marx and Max Stirner," 69).

⁵⁸² On this subject, see below.

⁵⁸³ For a short summary of Stirner's philosophy, see Filadelfo Linares, *Max Stirners Paradigmenwechsel* (Studien und Materialien zur Geschichte der Philosophie 41 [Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1995]). Other works in German are: Hans Helms's *Die Ideologie der anonymen Gesellschaft. Max Stirner "Einziger" und der Fortschritt des demokratischen Selbstbewußtseins vom Vormärz bis zur Bundesrepublik* (Cologne: Du Mont Schauberg, 1966) and Bernd Laska's *Ein dauerhafter Dissident. 150 Jahre Stirners 'Einziger'. Eine kurze Wirkungsgeschichte*, (Nuremberg: LSR-Verlag, 1996). In English, there are two useful sources; they are John Carroll's *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace. The Anarcho-Psychological Critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky* (London: Routledge, 1974), and John Clark's *Max Stirner's Egoism* (London: Freedom Press, 1976). Relevant articles and essays include: Andrew Koch, "Max Stirner: The Last Hegelian or the First Poststructuralist," *Anarchist Studies* 5 (1997), 95-108; Nicholas Lobkowitz, "Karl Marx and Max Stirner," in *Demythologising Marxism*, ed. by Frederick Adelman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 64-95; David Leopold, "The State and I: Max Stirner's Anarchism," in Douglas Moggach (ed.), *The New Hegelians. Politics and Philosophy in the Hegelian School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 176-99; Lawrence Stepelevich, "Max Stirner and Ludwig Feuerbach," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39 (1978), 451-63; and Widukind de Ridder, "Max Stirner, Hegel and the Young Hegelians."

⁵⁸⁴ Regarding the discussion of the title, see, R. W. K. Paterson, *The Nihilist Egoist Max Stirner* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), x.

notice.⁵⁸⁵ Little is known of his life, and the only images we have of him are two sketches by Engels.⁵⁸⁶ It seems he was not as charismatic and colorful as some of the other Young Hegelians, but his writing style attests to a lively and forceful mind. Stirner did not leave a mark in practical politics and lived fairly isolated for most of his life in Berlin, disappointed by some failed economic enterprises and chased by debt collectors. He was married to Marie Dänhardt, another German intellectual in the group around the Free, to which Stirner belonged. When he died, Bauer was present at his funeral, but hardly anybody else was.

Ego is sarcastically dubbed “*the book*” by Marx and Engels, whose primary goal it is to contest the work’s claim to originality. In mocking imitation of Stirner’s book, which makes frequent use of lengthy marginal commentaries whenever Stirner wants to pursue ideas not immediately related to the main argument, Marx and Engels keep the supposed body of their review article to a few pages, dealing with the article “Stirner’s Critics” (“Recensenten Stirners”; Stirner’s defense of his book against critical reviews by Szeliga, Feuerbach, and Hess⁵⁸⁷), and call their comprehensive analysis of *Ego* itself a

⁵⁸⁵ Stirner wrote a large number of articles for the *Rheinische Zeitung* when Marx took over as editor in 1842. This short piece was titled “The False Principle of Our Education, Or Humanism and Realism” (“Das unwahre Prinzip unserer Erziehung, oder Humanismus und Realismus,” 1842) and previews to some extent the themes of *Ego*. It was written in response to Otto Friedrich Theodor Heinsius’s *Humanism vs. Realism*. Stirner wrote other review essay, including one of Bauer, titled “Art and Religion” (“Kunst und Religion,” 1842). After the publication of *Ego*, he did not produce any other substantial works, perhaps mostly due to the fact that he lived in, at times desperate, poverty. His only later contributions to scholarship were translations of Jean-Baptiste Say and Adam Smith, some more journalistic works, and a two-volume book called *History of Reaction* (*Geschichte der Reaktion*, 1851-1852), a collection of texts on the topic of revolution.

⁵⁸⁶ What we do know about Stirner is mostly due to John Henry McKay, anarchist author and Stirner’s biographer. His book *Max Stirner: His Life and Work* remains a standard reference for anyone interested in Stirner. (*Max Stirner: Sein Leben und sein Werk* [Berlin, Schuster & Loeffler, 1898]; there has been a recent edition and translation of this work [2005].)

⁵⁸⁷ The articles by Szeliga (a friend and supporter of Bauer), Feuerbach, and Hess represented the three positions attacked by Stirner and were for the most part conceived as defenses of Bauerian idealism, Feuerbach’s materialism, and Hess’ socialism, respectively. It seems that *The German Ideology* was intended to be another such critical review, but because it remained unpublished, Stirner never had a chance to read and reply to it.

“church-historical meditation,” an “episodical insertion,” the latter being the term used by Stirner for his own digressions in *Ego*.

But not only the structure of *Ego* is caricatured by Marx and Engels⁵⁸⁸, the titles and subheadings are made fun of as well: The headings of part 1 “Man” (“Der Mensch”) and of part 2 “Ego” (“Ich”), for example, become “The Old Testament: Man” and “The New Testament: Ego” in *The German Ideology*. In this spirit of sardonic satire, Marx and Engels proceed systematically to work their way through the entire book, picking out every single slip-up, whether historical, theoretical, or even just grammatical, with the intention of discrediting the work from beginning to end. It is, therefore, quite impossible to glean from Marx and Engels’s description a sense of Stirner’s work as a meaningful statement and a radical one at that. In order to get such a sense, then, we shall read *Ego* along with *The German Ideology*. Moreover, since Marx and Engels stick so closely to Stirner’s book, analyzing and interpreting it line by line, a reading of *Ego* can only contribute to our analysis of the theoretical shortcomings *and* accomplishments of “Saint Max.” What I hope to show is that, while Marx and Engels do not do justice to Stirner’s insights into bourgeois rationality and its discontents, they aptly grasp the failures of his project.

The Idealist Construction of History

Stirner’s critique of idealism is essentially a critique of ideas and ideals. Thus, Stirner begins his book dramatically enough by pronouncing that “All things are nothing to me,”⁵⁸⁹ by which he means to denounce not only what Bauer called “the good cause of

⁵⁸⁸ Stirner himself had conceived of the divisions in his book as a reversal of the divisions in Feuerbach’s *The Essence*.

⁵⁸⁹ I will be using the standard English translation of the work, which is based on Steven Tracy Byington’s 1907 translation (Max Stirner, *Ego and Its Own*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, ed. by David Leopold and translated by Steven Tracy Byington [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

freedom” but all other “causes” as well, including “God’s cause, the cause of mankind, of truth, of freedom, of humanity, of justice . . . , the cause of my people, my prince, my fatherland . . . , even the cause of mind and a thousand other causes.”⁵⁹⁰ Refusing to subordinate himself to others’ causes, he vows to serve only his “egoistic” cause. He says: “Away, then, with every concern that is not altogether my concern!. . . Why, I myself am my concern. . . . My concern . . . is solely what is *mine* [*das Meinige*]. . . . Nothing is more to me than myself” (*Ego*, 7)!

It is precisely this first claim that Marx and Engels disable from the outset by declaring that Stirner’s egoism is as “imaginary” a cause (*CW* 5, 120) as any of those he rejects. His “idealistic phrases” (*ibid.*) are thus no different in kind from others; they are merely the phrases of a “holy egoist” (*ibid.*): “Thus we see what holy motives guide Saint Max in his transition to egoism. It is not the good things of this world, not treasures which moth and rust corrupt, not the capital belonging to his fellow unique ones, but heavenly treasure, the capital which belongs to God, truth, freedom, mankind, etc., that gives him no peace” (*ibid.*). Unable to put the book down and compelled, in turn, to criticize its every fiber, Marx and Engels find that Stirner’s ideology gives them no peace. Their motives, however, are not “holy” in because the causes they look for are not ideal causes but material causes.

To begin with, Marx and Engels take on Stirner’s history of humankind which, according to *Ego*, consists of three dialectically related moments, two of which have already come to pass. Stirner summarizes this view at the end of section I in part one:

“The child was realistic, taken up with the things of this world . . . ; the youth was

1995], 5). The exclamation at the beginning of the book is a reference to a line in one of Goethe’s poems, which reads “Ich hab’ mein’ Sach’ auf Nichts gestellt.”

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, hereafter cited parenthetically as *Ego*.

idealistic, inspired by thoughts . . .; Egoistic man, who deals with things and thoughts according to his heart's pleasure, and sets his personal interest above everything" (*Ego*, 17-8). Marx and Engels recognize this schematic as a typical philosophical construction. Given the pervasive influence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of the notion of history as an individual's biography writ large, it is significant that Marx and Engels were able to dismiss Stirner's story of human progress from realism (childhood) to idealism (youth) to egoism (adult/man) as ludicrous: Everything "is reduced to 'child, youth and man'. Everywhere we shall find nothing but disguised 'child, youth and man'" (*CW* 5, 130).

More specifically, however, they take issue with the narrative's "speculative distortion" (*CW* 5, 128) and the fact that Stirner apparently attributes the transition from childhood to youth to the sovereign power of "'the spirit' as such, of the spirit as *subject*" (*CW* 5, 123). Stirner conceives of the contemporary present as the last hour of the rule of the spirit and of himself as the harbinger of a new age when "man" will once again rule over spirit (his book embodying the first stage of the impending transformation). This notion of a future when humans will refuse to be governed by an independent consciousness and bring it under their control was, of course, deeply indebted to the Young Hegelian take on Hegel's concept of alienation. Hence, in addition to positing the emergence of a self-acting spirit, Stirner also relies on Feuerbach's notion that once humans forget they are the creators of their ideas, these ideas can become discrete and independent and exercise real dominance over people. This is not necessarily a contradiction, for Stirner conceives of the final synthesis between the material and the ideal as both a subjective and objective process.

Marx and Engels have no patience for what they see as intellectualist fairytales about the liberating power of critique. They argue that spirit is never an external entity and that people are never ruled by ideas turned autonomous thought tyrants – nor do people have any illusions to the contrary. Marx and Engels make this point very succinctly in a discussion of a crucial passage in Stirner’s book. In this passage, Stirner declares that the transition from youth to man takes place when the individual realizes that “he” is the master of the monsters he created. Stirner maintains that one must “find myself also behind *thoughts*” (after having found oneself behind things) as their “creator and *owner*.” Thus, he exclaims:

In the time of spirits thoughts grew until they overtopped my head, whose offspring they were; they hovered about me and convulsed me like fever-phantasies, an awful power. The thoughts had become *corporeal* on their own account, were ghosts, such as God, emperor, Pope, fatherland, etc. If I destroy their corporeity, then I take them back into mine, and say: ‘I alone am corporeal’. And now I take the world as what it is to me, as *mine*, as my property [*Eigentum*]; I refer all to myself. (*Ego*, 17)⁵⁹¹

To this, Marx and Engels reply that God, the emperor, the Pope, and the fatherland are based on a particular material reality, or “practical interrelations of the world” (*CW* 5, 126). It is this real world, not its conscious expressions, that exists outside and against the individual’s will, and because of its hard truth, it cannot be wished away by a simple mental act of reappropriation.

No matter how universalist and pervasive people’s mythological constructions, alienation is a material problem, not an ideal one. Hunger, for instance, stands over the

⁵⁹¹ I would argue that the translation in *CW* is more memorable; it reads: “[L]ike delirious fantasies they floated around me and agitated me greatly, a dreadful power. The thoughts became themselves corporeal, they were spectres like God, the Emperor, the Pope, the Fatherland, etc.; by destroying their corporeality, I take them back into my own corporeality and *announce*: I alone am corporeal. And now I take the world as it is for me, as *my* world, as my property: I relate everything to myself” (125). However, I have chosen to quote from the Byington translation, whenever appropriate, to make cross-referencing easier for the reader. Quotes from Marx that include quotes from Stirner, of course, are exempted from this *modus operandi*.

individual not as a concept having become corporeal but as a fundamental empirical reality (*CW* 5, 102). Believing that the Emperor is nothing but an idea become materialized and that man can “actually destroy” (*CW* 5, 126) the Emperor by destroying his “*spectral* corporeality” (ibid.) is, according to Marx and Engels, the real illusion. If Stirner thinks that “he has destroyed the power of the Emperor by giving up his fantastic conception of the Emperor” (ibid.), he is deluded because having merely “thrust spirits or ideas away” (*Ego*, 17), he has not changed actually existing reality: “He forgets that he has only destroyed the fantastic and spectral form assumed by the idea of ‘Fatherland’, etc., . . . but that he has still *not touched* these ideas, insofar as they express *actual* relations” (*CW* 5, 127). This argument is the quintessence of Marx and Engels’s critique of the Young Hegelians, and it is here that Stirner proves no different than Bauer and Feuerbach.

However, Marx and Engels also take issue with the fact that history, according to Stirner, is all about the individual’s “self-discoveries.” And since these are basically conceived as transformations of consciousness, Stirner is advancing idealism in its purest form. Stirner cannot theorize reality because he thinks that real men and women live a life of false consciousness in need of being rectified and because he mistakes his own and his fellow thinkers’ (philosophical) practice as the universal form of all practice, thereby displaying an “enormous gullibility,” which, Marx and Engels maintain, is “the true spirit of his book” (*CW* 5, 129). They state, “Since Saint Max pays no attention to the physical and social ‘life’ of the individual, and says nothing at all about ‘life,’ he quite consistently abstracts from historical epochs, nationalities, classes, etc., or, which is the *same thing*, he inflates the *consciousness* predominant in the class nearest to him in his

immediate environment into the normal consciousness of ‘a man’s life’” (ibid.). Marx and Engels juxtapose Stirner’s life as an intellectual with that of common workers in order to suggest that the formers’ situation is more “real” in the sense that it is not characterized by philosophical illusions. They propose that Stirner confront his supposedly idealistic modern individual (the “Mongol”) “with the first young clerk he encounters, a young English factory worker or young Yankee, not to mention the young Kirghiz-Kazakhs” (ibid.). The humor in Marx and Engels’s statement should not distract from the point that Stirner’s “reality” is not only very different from the reality of the oppressed classes in whose name he claims to speak.

The notion of history as a history of successive stages of consciousness is very conventional. For one thing, it was a mainstay of Hegel’s philosophy. However, according to Marx and Engels, even Hegel was more empirical than Stirner. What in Hegel might pass for descriptive detail (such as his depiction of Africa) degenerates into repetitive formalism in Stirner, and every concrete fact is construed as a mere carrier of “true development,”⁵⁹² as a superficial sign of some deeper ideal essence. Because of Stirner’s complete elision of all reality, Marx and Engels deride Stirner’s claim to offer a truly secular approach to history and ignore his critique of idealism while pointing only to the similarities between his fabrications and those of the German philosophers he attacks.

In effect, Stirner appears as an archetypal representative of German Young Hegelian philosophy which remains forever stuck at the level of the critique of religion. Blaming the “faith of individuals” in Christian and other false ideas for “the whole mischief” (*CW* 5, 362), this critical tradition is characterized by a “blind faith” in the historical role of beliefs, and in particular in the predominance of Christian beliefs in

⁵⁹² This term was employed by Ruge (“Dottore Graziano”) (131).

preventing social change, and by the vain prejudice that human agents affect history through a philosophical awakening, rather than labor and struggle. The result is a purely ideological worldview:

We spoke above of the German philosophical conception of history. Here, in Saint Max, we find a brilliant example of it. The speculative idea, the abstract conception, is made the driving force of history, and history is thereby turned into the mere history of philosophy. But even the latter is not conceived as, according to existing sources, it actually took place – not to mention how it evolved under the influence of real historical relations – but as it was understood and described by recent German philosophers, in particular Hegel and Feuerbach. . . . Thus history becomes a mere history of illusory ideas, a history of spirits and ghosts, while the real, empirical history that forms the basis of this ghostly history is only utilized to provide bodies for these ghosts; from it are borrowed the names required to clothe these ghosts with the appearance of reality. In making this experiment our saint frequently forgets his role and writes an undisguised ghost-story. (*CW* 5, 130-1)

What Marx and Engels call “[Stirner’s] method of making history in its most naïve and most classic simplicity’ is particularly obvious in his racial associations, which, to be sure, were neither atypical for the time period nor foreign to Hegelian philosophy. It is all the more significant, therefore, that Marx and Engels should subject these ideas to extensive ridicule. According to Stirner, the “realist egoist,” the child, who is dependent on things, is represented by the “Negro”; the “idealist egoist,” the youth, who is dependent on ideas, is represented by the “Mongol”; and the “true egoist,” the man, the “unique,” is, of course, represented by the “Caucasian,” the dialectical unity of realism and idealism, the epitome of History. This “hackneyed” nomenclature is a well-spring of categories which are further applied to any kind of development. So is, for example, the history of the Caucasian “period” divided into three phases, namely “the Ancients,” “the Moderns,” and “Ego,” which correspond to the Negro, Mongol, and Caucasian “essences.” With respect to religion, the same racist types and stereotypes reappear,

Catholicism embodying Negro realism and Protestantism exemplifying Mongol idealism, for instance. Finally, Man *qua* Man, having rid himself of his “Negroidity” and “Mongoloidity,” will be the supreme expression of the “really Caucasian” (*Ego*, 64) era, the third and last moment of the dialectic, the end of history, which is anticipated, of course, in the person of Stirner himself.

Whether or not we can forgive Stirner today for his racist historical constructions⁵⁹³, we may be able also to appreciate *his* version of ideology critique. Stirner maintains that the rule of the ideal realm brought about the rule of the idealists, the philosophers, and that if we wish to shake off the grip of the ideals we must wrest power away from those who represent them, live on account of them, cultivate them, and enjoy a privileged status because of them. This argument is as close as Stirner gets to the idea of class struggle, but he overestimates the role of the thinkers (and underestimates the role of objective, as opposed to subjective, forces). Moreover, his concept of struggle is an ideal one, and here is why: Having posited the rise of spirit to omnipotence, he speculates on the manner in which the supercession of the idea over substance occurred. His solution is that it proceeded *via* “hierarchy” or the domination of the “educated” over the “uneducated.” It is thus that Stirner imagines that not only thought but thinkers have taken over the world. This is, according to Marx and Engels, the height of absurdity, for the impotence and passivity of the idealist philosopher are construed as his power: “In

⁵⁹³ While I cannot pursue the problem of racism in detail here, it is worth noting that Stirner earnestly believed that “[t]he history of the world . . . belongs altogether to the Caucasian race” (*Ego*, 62). According to him, there were “two Caucasian ages, in the first of which we had to work out and work off our innate *Negroidity*; this was followed in the second by *Mongoloidity* (Chineseness), which must likewise be terribly made end of. Negroidity represents *antiquity*, the time of dependence on *things* . . . , Mongoloidity the time of dependence on thoughts, the *Christian* time. Reserved for the future are the words, ‘I am owner of the world of things, and I am owner of the world of mind’ (ibid., 62-3). Even more blatantly, a paragraph down, Stirner refers to the “Mongols” as “vermin” and to the “Chinese” as “assiduous” “ants,” as “totally buried in precepts,” a static culture where . . . nothing ‘essential’ or ‘substantial’ suffers a change” (ibid., 63). The Caucasians are called “*heaven-storming* men of Caucasian blood . . . [because] they throw off their Mongolian skin” (ibid., 65).

this way Stirner converts the speculative notion of the domination of the speculative idea in history into the notion of the domination of the speculative philosophers themselves . . . the world domination of the ideologists. This shows how deeply Stirner has plunged into speculation” (*CW* 5, 133).

Because of the manner in which Stirner’s philosophy mimics the very traditional idealism that his “ego” seeks to surpass, he is exposed by Marx and Engels as a heretic in words and appearance only. Holding on to conventional philosophical categories with religious steadfastness and refusing to concern himself with concrete material conditions, Stirner is “[t]he very pious Saint Max, *Jacques le bonhomme*, [who] has nothing real and mundane to say about real mundane history” (*CW* 5, 134). The formulaic character of his constructions makes him an idealist par excellence, comparable not only with Hegel but also, and more so, with Schelling, “the model of all constructors” (*ibid.*). In fact, Marx and Engels use Hegel’s critique of Schelling to argue that Stirner’s philosophy is like Schelling’s a “monotonous formalism” (*ibid.*). Hegel, commenting on Schelling’s tedious juxtaposition of ideal binaries, compared Schelling to a painter who has only two colors on his paint tray. Marx and Engels, in their turn, quote Hegel’s remarks and insert Stirner’s categories into the quoted passage, adding, with a quip on Stirner’s racial schemata, the words “realistic, childish, Negroid” after “black” and the words “idealist, youthful, Mongolian” after “yellow.”

Equipped with abstract concepts only, Stirner conceives of the transition from the ancient to the modern world as one which transpired out of a built-in telos, arguing, as he does, that antiquity sought its own negation in Christianity. Positing the rise of modern skepticism as a self-generating phenomenon and thus neglecting to see that the collapse

of the Greek and Roman states was a “consequence of practical conflicts,” Stirner or “Jacques le bonhomme transforms the idealist symptom into the material cause of the collapse” (*CW* 5, 136). In the process, “Jacques le bonhomme, like all other speculative philosophers, seizes everything by its philosophical tail” (*ibid.*, 137). For example, Stirner wants to explain the marginal status of the early Christians as a result of their Christianity. Marx and Engels, however, “put reality the right way up” (*CW* 5, 137) by explaining that people’s poverty brought about Christianity: “It was not their Christianity that made them vagrants, but their vagrancy that made them Christians” (*ibid.*). Stirner “stands facts on their heads, [and] causes material history to be produced by ideal history” (*ibid.*). The ideologist takes the ideal effects of history to be its basis. Again, history is turned into the history of philosophy, and real conflicts are reduced to a “struggle of abstractions” (*ibid.*, 138).

However, the stubborn facts can only be assimilated with great difficulty into Stirner’s philosophy of history/history of philosophy, including the facts pertaining strictly to philosophy itself. As Marx and Engels show, Stirner’s presentation of Ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, for instance, is sorely lacking in complexity and historical veracity. The problem, in Marx and Engels’s words, is that “[t]he history of ancient philosophy has to conform to Stirner’s design. In order that the Greeks should retain their role of children, Aristotle ought not to have lived . . . [and] his *Metaphysics* and the third book of his *Psychology* ought not to have existed” (*CW* 5, 142). Calling him an “ignorant school-master” (*ibid.*, 143), Marx and Engels maintain that Stirner’s entire neat system is not only bad science, but also that it is the typical product of a “good German,” a “German schoolteacher” (*ibid.*, 119), who, like his colleagues, is just “accustomed to

counterpose antiquity, as the epoch of reality, to Christianity and modern times, as the epoch of idealism” (ibid., 144).⁵⁹⁴ It is this eclectic, undisciplined, and prejudiced approach to history that discredits Stirner as a scholar-historian and makes his work pseudo-scientific and speculative in Marx and Engels’s eyes.

Unlike Marx and Engels, who, already in “I. Feuerbach,” elaborate their ideas on the historical development of one mode of production to another, Stirner does not seem to see the need to transition to a study of social relations, economic forms of intercourse, or historical revolutions. Rather, he remains consistently on the level of abstractions. For example, when, speaking of “the moderns,” Stirner claims that the world of things disappeared, he mistakes the otherworldly orientation of the Christian religion with actual reality. Of course, the world of things never disappeared; it continued to exist, and it continued to be seen and experienced as reality. And, of course, it continued to dominate people’s real lives. Only the theologian/philosopher could imagine that thingly existence had vanished. Stirner’s mistake is that he simply accepts these misconceptions as true: “For him the history of the Middle Ages and modern times again exists only as the history of religion and philosophy; he devoutly believes all the illusions of these epochs and the philosophical illusions about these illusions” (*CW* 5, 145).

Because of his credulity, his undying belief in the “ghostly world” (*CW* 5, 138), Stirner is a tragicomic figure akin to Don Quixote, Cervantes’s anti-hero, and his struggle against specters is portrayed by Marx and Engels as analogous to Quixote’s struggle against the windmills. But while Stirner has all the naïveté and foolish fanaticism of Don Quixote, he is even closer to Sancho Panza in terms of his basic world outlook. In

⁵⁹⁴ Marx and Engels make a point to add that, by contrast, “the French and English economists, historians, and scientists are accustomed to regard antiquity as the period of idealism in contrast to the materialism and empiricism of modern times” (*CW* 5, 144). It is clear that they attribute more truth value to this claim than to the opposite notion.

contrast to Szeliga, whom Marx and Engels portray as Stirner's teacher and whom they describe as a hopelessly muddled idealist⁵⁹⁵, Stirner is not a man of the mind but a man of the belly; he is Sancho Panza, the down-to-earth servant whose practical dispositions cannot prevent him from following his master down the road of delusion.⁵⁹⁶ Thus, he partakes in the ridiculous struggle against ordinary mundane objects that appear to have extraordinary powers. Acting as if the idealist constructions were true, he is a *de facto* believer. Worse yet, Stirner hypocritically crusades for the cause of egoism but against what he calls "ordinary egoism," while being obliquely aware, like Sancho Panza, that his crusade is entirely based on the promise of material rewards.

Confusing his fantasy world with the real world, Stirner performs what Marx and Engels consistently refer to as "conjuring tricks." These tricks help to sustain the make-believe of the philosophers, but the thinkers play them to some extent unwittingly, and therefore their hypocrisy is structurally conditioned credulity. Perhaps ideology's most commonly used conjuring trick, or *Eskamotage*, is what Slavoj Žižek has theorized, borrowing from Jacques Lacan, under the concept of "quilting" in the context of identity/interpellation.⁵⁹⁷ In contrast to contemporary cultural theory, however, Marx attributed this operation specifically to the philosophical critique of ideas. He described the process by which a special meaning (transcendent quality) gets affixed retroactively to a particular historical conjuncture, which, as a result, is presented as the fulfillment of

⁵⁹⁵ Szeliga was the pseudonym of one Franz Zychlin von Zychlinski, a close associate and follower of Bruno Bauer. It would seem that Marx and Engels were familiar with Szeliga's articles and saw Stirner as his rebellious "student," though I have not been able to ascertain which of Szeliga's writings Stirner or Marx and Engels knew.

⁵⁹⁶ "The Leipzig Council," however, Marx and Engels play with Stirner's term "ownership" to say that he is "simultaneously the 'phrase' and the 'owner of the phrase', simultaneously Sancho Panza and Don Quixote" (*CW*, 95). Towards the end of Volume 1, however, Marx and Engels return to the Szeliga-Stirner relationship, claiming now that the latter surpasses even the former in "Don Quixotry" (271), i.e. in being "afraid of 'spectres' and even assert[ing] that they alone are to be feared" (*ibid.*).

⁵⁹⁷ See, for example, Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 111.

a preordained task. The ruse of attributing a higher purpose to a particular situation or development consists in the teleological construction of the end as contained in the beginning. While in psychoanalytical terms this “suturing” is essentially one of the mechanisms of the symbolic order as such and thus equivalent to discourse, Marx and Engels viewed it as a fallacy or maneuver characteristic of idealist philosophy. They explain that it is the “speculative manner, by which children beget their father, and what is earlier is brought about by what is later” (*CW* 5, 145).

One example discussed by Marx and Engels is Stirner’s account of the emergence of Christianity. Stirner portrays the Jews as having awaited, and even as having had the task of bringing forth, the rise of Christianity. Thus, “*Christianity*, for Jacques le bonhomme, is a self-positing subject, the absolute spirit, which ‘originally’ posits its end as its beginning” (*CW* 5, 145-146). Against this philosophical representation, Marx and Engels submit the materialist claim that “‘*Christianity*’ *has no history whatsoever*,” i.e. no history of its own, and that it was “brought about by wholly empirical causes” (*ibid.*, 154). The need for the study of these empirical causes is precisely the imperative that is the original Marxian meaning of Fredric Jameson’s proclamation “Always historicize!”⁵⁹⁸ In other words, this same example, the problem of the separation of Christianity from Judaism, which Stirner wants to see as the dawn of the idealist age, which for him means the age of the Ideal, demonstrates yet another conjuring trick which Marx and Engels believe is specific to the philosophy of ideas. Apart from imagining that historical events are the realization of built-in tendencies or objectives, Stirner specifically transforms spiritual effects, also through a metaphysical enhancement and reversal, into causes.

⁵⁹⁸ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 9.

Marx and Engels use different ways to describe the systematic elision of material factors. One other means by which they illustrate the idealist's confusion is by speaking of the "trick of making something out of nothing" (*CW* 5, 150). Stirnerian idealism does not just posit the hegemony of the spirit in the modern era, it also posits a self-positing spirit, a spirit that creates itself out of nothing.⁵⁹⁹ Spontaneous, self-generating spirit, having made its appearance with the ancients, strides forward to victory and finally achieves dominance by creating what Stirner calls an enormously large "realm of spirits," a "spiritual world" (*Ego*, 30). In the section titled "The spirit," Stirner exclaims, "As the spirit exists only in its creating of the spiritual, let us take a look about us for its first creation. . . . The first creation . . . must come forth 'out of nothing'; that is, the spirit has toward its realization nothing but itself, or rather it has not yet even itself, but must create itself; hence its first creation is itself, *the spirit*" (ibid., 32). As evidence, Stirner cites the apparently obvious fact that humans create themselves as thinking beings only after they have thought their first thought. Marx and Engels ridicule this idea as one of "the long-familiar orthodox Hegelian phrases" (*CW* 5, 149) and assert that human beings create themselves as real individuals who make themselves on the basis not of nothing but of a "manifold something": "Therefore, in the development of a property something is created by something out of something, and by no means comes, as in Hegel's *Logik*, from nothing, through nothing to nothing" (ibid., 150).

This ideological distortion of the dialectic leads to yet another crucial mistake: the notion that thinking is the sole and essential act that defines individual human beings as

⁵⁹⁹ Thus, Stirner says: "The first creation . . . must come forth 'out of nothing'; that is, the spirit has toward its realization nothing but itself, or rather it has not yet even itself, but must create itself; hence its first creation is itself, *the spirit*. Mystical as this sounds, we yet go through it as an everyday experience. Are you a thinking being before you think? In creating the first thought you create yourself, the thinking one; for you do not think before you think a thought, or have a thought" (32-33).

they produce and reproduce their conditions of existence in the world. Specifically, Stirner assumes that “the moderns” are first and foremost Christians, i.e. believers in religious ideas, rather than living, laboring, suffering, and acting human beings. In an implicit critical reference to Szeliga, Stirner denounces the moderns for wanting to be “pure spirit” and to leave behind every other predicate, including their very own corporeality. He polemicizes, “Against all that is not spirit you are a zealot, and therefore you play the zealot against *yourself* who cannot get rid of a remainder of the non-spiritual” (*Ego*, 33). It must be granted that this argument is not necessarily at odds with Marx and Engels’s critique of idealism, and in fact they use this same line of attack in their rebuke of “Saint Bruno.” However, Stirner wrongly imagines that an illusion that is proper to philosophy rules an entire epoch and that people in general have, in Marx and Engels’s words, “put their stomachs among the stars” (*CW* 5, 152).

Interestingly, Stirner chastises Feuerbach for conceiving of human beings not as individual “egos” but as expressions of an ideal essence. Against Feuerbach, Stirner declares that “it is quite immaterial whether we see it [essence] outside him [man] and view it as ‘God’, or find it in him and call it ‘essence of man’ or ‘man’” (*Ego*, 34). While Stirner was not the only one to criticize Feuerbach at this time – Hess, too, had declared in 1845 that if the secret of theology was anthropology, the secret of anthropology was socialism – it was a radical argument that had an immense impact on Marx’s own critique of humanism. Of course, even though Marx and Engels leave this radically anti-idealist impulse behind Stirner’s work uncommented, we know now that they had little choice but to agree with its main point: that Feuerbach had in fact substituted one kind of otherworldliness for another. What they recognized and Stirner did not is that Feuerbach

retained not only the concept of an essence, which is necessarily an idealist abstraction, but also the concept of the ontological primacy of the ideal.

As indicated, then, we know that it was probably due to Stirner that Marx and Engels came to revise their earlier enthusiasm for Feuerbach, even though, as I have shown in the previous chapter, Marx criticized Bauer for his idealist notion of social change (albeit without calling it ‘ideological’) before reading *Ego*. Stirner, however, virulently challenged Feuerbach’s claim to have reduced religion completely to its anthropological basis. Thus, he says that “even the newest revolts against God are nothing but the extremest efforts of theology, that is, theological insurrections” (*Ego*, 30) and remarks extensively on how “thoroughly theological . . . the liberation that Feuerbach is labouring to give us” is (ibid. 33). Stirner further declares that “it is quite immaterial whether we see it [the supreme being] outside him [man] and view it as ‘God’, or find it in him and call it ‘essence of man’ or ‘man’” (*Ego*, 34).

To sum up Stirner’s argument, we can say that it is an argument against Christian morality and what he perceives as its philosophical mutations. Stirner claims that Christian consciousness has turned reality itself into a spook, and the world, so haunted by apparitions, has become an apparition. In a final inversion, this spook or apparition is imbued once more with a body – but with a spiritual pseudo-body only. Stirner describes this process as follows: “‘Spirits exist!’ Look about in the world, and say for yourself whether a spirit does not gaze upon you out of everything. Out of the lovely, little flower there speaks to you the spirit of the Creator, who has shaped it so wonderfully; the stars proclaim the spirit that established their order; from the mountain-tops a spirit of sublimity breathes down; out of the waters a spirit of yearning murmurs up” (*Ego*, 36).

He claims that civilization views the world, and every detail in it, as infused with (a divine) spirit, as created with and for a purpose. Spirits are on all sides, he exclaims, and this presence is an eerie one: “Yes, the whole world is haunted! Only *is* haunted? Indeed, it itself ‘walks,’ it is uncanny through and through, it is the wandering seeming-body [*Scheinleib*] of a spirit, it is a spook. What else should a ghost be, then, than an apparent body, but real spirit? Well, the world is ‘empty’, . . . it is the seeming-body of a spirit.” The world, then, has ceased to exist because it is inhabited only by ghosts: “Everything that appears to you is only the phantasm of an indwelling spirit, is a ghostly ‘apparition’; the world is to you only a ‘world of appearances [*Erscheinungswelt*]’, behind which the spirit walks” (ibid.).

It is difficult not to acknowledge the ingenuity of Stirner’s “haunting” formulations, especially since his Hegelian account of the God-Man Jesus Christ is indeed a model of radical religious criticism. According to Stirner, Jesus Christ is a product of a world that has turned itself into a specter, a semblance, an empty shell. In “this inverted world, the world of essences” people have “for thousands of years” set themselves the “task” of “transforming the spook into a non-spook, the unreal into something real, the spirit into an *entire* and *corporeal* person” (ibid. 40). But Jesus is emblematic of the Christian self-negation, which, according to Stirner, is due to the endless search for essences and the will to know essence and make it real. The result: “The longing to make the spook comprehensible . . . has brought about a *corporeal ghost*, a ghost or spirit with a real body, an embodied ghost” (ibid. 41).

The main problem, however, is that Stirner believes alienation can be reduced to religion because he fails to relate the ideal nature of the latter to the material structures

underlying the former. As a result, he takes religion to be *the* defining moment of society rather than its mode of production. So he equates Christian beliefs with society as a whole. There are further consequences. For one, what Marx later describes in the “Communist Manifesto” as the process of continuous material transformation under the rule of the bourgeois – the “constantly revolutionizing” effect of capital – must go unnoticed for Stirner. Seeing nothing but “holies” everywhere, Stirner cannot discern, as Marx does, the inherently secularizing tendency of modernity when “all that is holy is profaned.”⁶⁰⁰ In *The German Ideology*, Marx observes that the Christian world “was not only *spiritualised* but equally *despiritualised*” (*CW* 5, 153). Because Stirner misses this critical fact, he cannot grasp that alienation, for the moderns, is a direct product of their material relations and hence primarily a material problem, not a spiritual one.

Yet another consequence is that, as persuasive as Stirner’s “phenomenology” of Christianity may be, it uses religion as an explanation when religion is really that which must be explained. Insofar as his perspective begins and ends with religion, his perspective is therefore religious: “The standpoint at which people are content with such tales about spirits is itself a religious one, because for people who adopt it religion is a satisfactory answer, they regard religion as *causa sui* . . . instead of explaining it from the empirical conditions and showing how definite relations of industry and intercourse are necessarily connected with a definite form of society, hence, with a definite form of state and hence with a definite form of religious consciousness” (*CW* 5, 154). This is, of course, where the difference between Stirner’s idealist approach and Marx and Engels’s materialist approach becomes manifest.

⁶⁰⁰ Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels-Reader*, 2nd edition (New York: W W Norton, 1978), 478.

The Real Movement of History

But while Marx and Engels could not but agree (implicitly, through silence on the issue) with Stirner that Feuerbach's attempt at liberating humankind was in some ways just as "theological" as the religious alienation Feuerbach had wanted to overcome, they found Stirner repeating Feuerbach's mistakes. Their tone may be argumentative, but their point is well taken. According to Marx and Engels, Stirner too makes the error of "seeing spirits" everywhere (*CW* 5, 152). To wit, he exclaims, "The realm of spirits is monstrously great, there is an infinite deal of the spiritual" (*Ego*, 30). Stirner himself does not share this belief that there is a "realm of spirits," but he attributes this belief to his contemporaries. Marx and Engels maintain that in doing so, he projects certain philosophical inclinations onto his epoch. The philosopher's tendency to view what is real as an expression of what is ideal and the critic's assumption that real people live in an ideal world are both forms of ideology, the (pre)occupation with ideas. For this reason, Marx and Engels conclude that there is a basic continuity linking Feuerbach's radical philosophy and Stirner's anti-philosophy.

Where Marx and Engels clearly disagree with Stirner is the point at which Stirner asserts that the communist movements of his time were basically a kind of idealist philosophy, a claim that is anticipated in Stirner's argument that atheism is just another religion. It is not surprising that Marx and Engels would find the reduction of the thoroughly secular outlook of the communists to the status of a "spook" objectionable. However, they also challenge Stirner's reduction of all social theory to the status of alienated consciousness. Basically, they demonstrate that Stirner extends the critique of religion beyond its breaking point. Religion is the enemy, and because the world is

nothing but religion, the world has become the enemy. In Stirner's world, the "moderns" are all "servants of a highest essence"; in effect, they are all "pious people, the most raging atheist not less than the most faith-filled Christian" (*Ego*, 40). As for Feuerbach, humans are separated from themselves because they have split part of their being off and projected it outward. This part is consciousness. Objectified thus, ideas become "things" that are thought to be "beyond" actually existing people: "Every higher essence, such as truth, mankind, and so on, is an essence *over us*" (*CW* 5, 38). This creates a sense of permanent displacement or homelessness: We are not one with ourselves. In Stirner's words, alienness happens because "In everything sacred there lies something "uncanny," that is strange, such as we are not quite familiar and at home in. What is sacred to me is not my own" (*CW* 5, 38-9).

Marx and Engels, on the other hand, maintain that, far from being coterminous with alienation, religious and quasi-religious speculation are merely distinctive forms thereof, and that abstraction, which is the determinant of all alienation, is not always, nor even mostly, ideal. Real abstraction, the concept of which is generally attributed to the later Marx, is already contrasted in *The German Ideology* with mental abstraction, or ideology. Stirner observes that Bauer and Feuerbach are also advocating a kind of "holy" or "sacred" ideal, quite similar to Christian theology, but Marx and Engels point out that this is because they are ideologists who imagine that the world is in the thrall of a higher essence. In reality, it is the ideologists themselves who are thus enthralled. The rest of humankind, in the meantime, has been trying to liberate itself from its material bonds, the real condition of alienation; these people may have certain illusions about who they are

and what they are doing, but they are not “possessed,” nor are they the puppets of an *idée fixe*. Rather, people actively resist oppression, circumstance, and objectification.

Since the Marxist concept of ideology is often (falsely) linked in contemporary cultural theory with the spurious distinction between scientific knowledge on the one hand and the mystified consciousness of the masses on the other, it is important to note that the Marx and Engels of *The German Ideology* were very adamant in their rejection of any attempt to think of the proletariat as stupid or delusional. There are several passages in *The German Ideology* where Marx and Engels acknowledge that people imbue semblances with a proxy corporeality; however, they also argue forcefully that transcendent universals do not animate people in their everyday struggles. Hegel may have believed that really existing individuals are nothing but the external housing of spirit in its historical manifestation, but the Hegel critic Stirner is “naïve when he asserts that really existing individuals actually share this “incredible belief” (*CW* 5, 157).

However, Stirner’s brazen elitism, which masks his credulity, is not idiosyncratic; it is conventional. The arrogance in his approach is readily apparent. To wit, we might juxtapose Stirner’s argument that humankind has gone mad with Marx and Engels’s pointed reply that it is in fact he who has gone mad inasmuch as he, just like a madman, thinks everyone around him is mad. Stirner proclaims, “Do not think that I am jesting or speaking figuratively when I regard those persons who cling to the higher, and (because the vast majority belongs under this head) almost the whole world of men, as veritable fools, fools in a madhouse” (*Ego*, 43). Marx and Engels respond that this is so only in “the world of his deranged mind” (*CW* 5, 161). But Marx and Engels are not primarily interested in simply turning around Stirner’s charge that his contemporaries are but a

bunch of “lunatics,” “maniacs,” “arch-fools,” who belong in the “insane asylum” (*Ego*, 43). *Rather, they want to demonstrate that Stirner’s madness is his idealism and that this idealism is structural.* Stirner generalizes his preoccupation with ideals by projecting it onto the whole world. Thus, when Marx and Engels say that “[t]he whimsy which Saint Max discovers in the heads of people is nothing but his own whimsy . . .” (*CW* 5, 161) and that the “fanaticism” (*Ego*, 44) he attributes to the moderns is all his invention, they express the idea that Stirner is universalizing the effects of the specific activity that is mental labor. Insofar as it results from objective conditions, this universalization has at its root processes that take place behind Stirner’s back. Therefore, the madness is first and foremost a fact of reality rather than a personal fault of Stirner.

In Marx and Engels’s critique, Stirner is a quixotic figure because he exerts his energies in the battle against chimeras and makes himself ridiculous by failing to take reality for what it is. Just as Don Quixote battles windmills, imagining that they are fierce giants, Stirner battles monstrous spirits, imagining that they are wielding power over the humans. Because he sheds – together with Strauß and Bauer – a “sympathetic tear at the grave of the victims of Christ” (*CW* 5, 158) and is unable to stop thinking about “[t]he split between phenomenon and essence [which] gives him no peace” (*ibid.*), Stirner is as pathetic as Cervantes’ hero. Like Don Quixote, Stirner cannot differentiate between *his* world, the fantasy world of high ideals, great quests, and heroic individuals, and the real world. Stirner’s obsessive concern with religious and philosophical concepts has blinded him to what actually exists. He imagines that people act on beliefs when in actuality they act on material interests. It is critical to note that Marx and Engels do not deny that people have a variety of beliefs and may even explain their actions by pointing to their

beliefs, but they distinguish such “phrases” from political and, in the final analysis, economic reasons, motivations, or causes. They maintain that Saint Max “takes both the hypocritical phrases of people and their illusions for the true motives of their actions” (*CW* 5, 161). Their ideas, such as the idea of “nationality,” are “inessentialities” (*CW* 5, 160) in the sense that they do not drive people’s practices; the driving force in society is material relations and conflicts. By the same token, people engage in politics and economic activity not because, as Stirner has it, they believe in the concept of *homo politicus* or *homo oeconomicus* but because human society is inexorably political and economic.

In other words, religious and other ideas do exist in the minds of people, but they are neither self-sustaining realities nor self-sufficient explanations for reality. Marx and Engels state, “In religion people make their empirical world into an entity that is only conceived, imagined, that confronts them as something foreign. [However, t]his again is . . . to be explained . . . from the entire hitherto existing mode of production and intercourse, which is just as independent of the pure concept as the invention of the self-acting mule and the use of railways are independent of Hegelian philosophy” (*ibid.*). It should be noted again that Marx and Engels are *not* claiming here that religious, nationalist, or cultural commitments cannot command loyalty – they obviously do – or cannot produce compelling narratives that sway public and personal sentiments – they clearly do – but rather that they do not determine history.⁶⁰¹ Technological development

⁶⁰¹ Samuel Huntington’s thesis of the new (post-Cold War) world order based on cultural conflict is the most controversial but in many ways conventional argument, according to which historical shifts in power are the product of clashes of ideas. This philosophy is merely the counterpart of the Fukuyama’s thesis that the idea of liberal democracy has assumed global dominance and brought historical development to an end. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997 [1996]), and Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

and its contradictions with the relations of production is, for Marx and Engels, the only motor of history. In other words, economic interests and class struggle are the keys to understanding history.

But Stirner thinks that we are defined by our ideas and that the course of history depends on ridding ourselves from abstract principles. The principles he finds most odious are virtues like selflessness and charity, and he proposes that we free ourselves from them by putting “the searching knife of criticism” to our “fixed ideas” (*Ego*, 44). This effort is based on the mistaken assumption that the problem is consciousness, or a lack thereof, and that the state of society should be blamed on bad ideas. The notion that we need to divest ourselves of what in contemporary parlance are called our “grand narratives”⁶⁰² in order to free ourselves from oppression is a laughable proposition in Marx and Engels’s eyes. This is because narratives, no matter how grand, have never “ruled the world” (*CW* 5, 160)⁶⁰³, and ideas do not need to be forced back under our control like Goethe’s broom that was accidentally transformed by the young “Sorcerer’s Apprentice”⁶⁰⁴ from an ordinary household item into a tyrannical monster machine. Stirner, in trying to break the magic, accepts the notion that the spirits conjured by humans come to haunt them, wresting their sovereignty from them and leaving them the

⁶⁰² Jean-François Lyotard has popularized the term “meta-narrative” in his work *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1984), arguing that postmodernity is characterized by an “incredulity” towards the grand philosophies that have organized modern societies. There is an intriguing connection which cannot be pursued here between Stirner’s arguments and Lyotard’s in the sense that both base their approaches on the notion that modern life centered around a set of concepts, such as progress, humanity, and truth, as well as in the sense that the latter diagnoses in the present what Stirner prognosticated: a fragmentation of the edifying and unifying meanings in favor of small-scale and plastic particular identities.

⁶⁰³ The full quote reads: “And since Saint Max shares the belief of all critical speculative philosophers of modern times that thoughts, which have become independent, objectified thoughts—ghosts—have ruled the world and continue to rule it, and that all history up to now was the history of theology, nothing could be easier for him than to transform history into a history of ghosts. Sancho’s history of ghosts, therefore, rests on the traditional belief in ghosts of the speculative philosophers” (ibid.).

⁶⁰⁴ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, “Der Zauberlehrling,” in *Selected Verse: Dual-Language Edition* (London: Penguin, 1982), 173-177.

hapless victims of a foreign power. Stirner's ideology rests on the premise that humans have lost sight of the fact that they are the creative force in history and now deem themselves subject to their own ideas, to which they have wrongly attributed corporeality and autonomy. According to Stirner, in order to throw off this yoke, we need only lift the spell and remember that we conjured the spirits in the first place. Marx and Engels agree with Stirner that humans are the originators of their ideas, but they view the fear of the rule of abstractions as specific to the philosophers and maintain that everybody else is not much concerned with abstractions at all. That is, abstractions are the business of the ideologists. People may believe that there is a God, and maybe they believe that they serve God. But they do not actually work for God; they work for a wage. People work to survive, and it is this "struggle for survival" that dominates their lives.⁶⁰⁵ In the last instance, it is not what people think but what people do that "matters" – in the sense that it is the stuff of history.

Marx and Engels illustrate their materialist approach in a short discussion of cultural differences which amounts to a critique of anthropological idealism. If polygamy and incest are considered taboo, it is, according to Stirner, because of the Christian idea that monogamy and the prohibition of incest are regarded as sacred or holy, the conclusion being that if polygamy and incest are not taboo in other cultures, this is because *there* they are regarded as holy. Marx and Engels argue that such an explanation is not an explanation at all since "[i]t is not possible to see any difference between these two 'holies' other than that the nonsense with which the Persians and Turks have 'stuffed

⁶⁰⁵ Both Marxian and Darwinian theory emerged from the context of nineteenth century political economy and are linked with one another in key aspects. However, Marx and Engels were also critical of Darwinism, specifically of Social Darwinism, its direct translation of the principles of bourgeois economy into natural history, and its reduction of society to the "struggle for life." On the subject of the connections between Darwin's theory of natural selection and 19th century political economy, see Silvan Schweber, "The Origin of the *Origin* Revisited" in *Journal of the History of Biology* 10 (1977), 229–316.

their heads' is different from that with which the Christian Germanic peoples have stuffed their heads" (*CW* 5, 162). By that, they mean that it is all well and good to say that a certain practice or concept is a sacred command, imperative, or value in one culture but not in another, but this does nothing in the way of providing an account of why different cultures have different values. Only an investigation of the real roots of particular cultural practices can reveal their *raison d'être*. However, "Jacques le bonhomme has so little inkling of the real, material causes for the condemnation of polygamy and incest in certain social conditions that he considers this condemnation to be merely the dogma of a creed" (*ibid.*).⁶⁰⁶

Of course, Stirner's ultimate goal is to argue that all holies limit and repress the individual personality and must be renounced. This key aspect of his thinking appears thoroughly proto-Nietzschean⁶⁰⁷ insofar as the critique of morality advanced by Stirner is coupled with a concept of the "will to power" that is very similar to the one put forth by Nietzsche later. The fact that power determines the coordinates of what is considered "good and proper," that "right" is predicated upon "might," is interpreted by Stirner as a

⁶⁰⁶ Interestingly, Stirner also chides Proudhon for upholding the sanctity of "moral law," declaring that the crime against "pure morals" is the only true outrage, the only truly heretic deed (*ibid.*, 46).

⁶⁰⁷ The question of whether Nietzsche was influenced by Stirner has been much debated. Since the early 1900's, a connection between Nietzsche and Stirner has been claimed even though the former does not mention the latter anywhere in his writings and thus there cannot be any positive evidence that Nietzsche read *Ego*. There have been many who have argued against a connection between the two thinkers (see, for example, Albert Lévy, *Stirner and Nietzsche* [Paris: Société Nouvelle de Librairie et d'Édition, 1904]), but there seems to be a general consensus now that the resemblances between the two writers' ideas are too significant to be coincidental. It is certain that Nietzsche knew of Stirner's book through both other works he was closely familiar with and personal acquaintances of Stirner. Nietzsche is also known to have talked to friends about Stirner and to have directed his favorite student to *Ego*. It is difficult to imagine that Nietzsche should not have read the work, though it is possible. The opposite accusation that he was guilty of plagiarism cannot be confirmed either. The problem cannot be pursued in detail here, but for a discussion of the evidence for a positive connection, see Bernd A. Laska, "Nietzsches initiale Krise. Die Stirner-Nietzsche-Frage in neuem Licht," in *Germanic Notes and Reviews*, vol. 33, n. 2, Fall/Herbst 2002, 109-133; and the more cautious position by Thomas H. Brobjer in "Philologica: A Possible Solution to the Stirner-Nietzsche Question," in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* - Issue 25, Spring 2003, 109-114. For an alternative interpretation, see Gilles Deleuze's arguments to that effect in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (New York : Columbia University Press, 1983).

license to kill, so to speak. After all, he says, “A Nero is a “bad” man only in the eyes of the ‘good’” (*Ego* 51). But Stirner, like Nietzsche after him, proclaims that a revolution is therefore first a change in morality. He posits that the subjected must find the “courage to give up ‘moral, obedient subjection’” (*Ego*, 52). Whether Stirner knew it or not, he effectively reversed the terms of his own theory, that material dominance guarantees ideal dominance, by claiming that the former could be gained through the latter. From Marx and Engels’s perspective, both the conclusion and the assumption are wrong.

Marx and Engels do not quarrel with the claim that morality becomes a means to an end in the struggle for power. However, the failure or success of a revolution has nothing to do with morality, as it does for Stirner, who believes that the “weak” use it as an excuse for their own lack of will. The Marxian standpoint, on the other hand, is that private property – not a vague personal attribute called “courage” – is the source of class divisions, and the particular regime of ownership subjects people as much as it imbues them with subjectivity, a kind of historical will, which asserts itself under particular material conditions, such as when the conflict between the forces of production and the relations of production has reached a climax. The focus of analysis thus must be shifted elsewhere. The critique of morality, Marx and Engels maintain, does not achieve anything as long as we remain ignorant of the underlying conditions and processes.

The Marxian response to Stirner’s attack on idealist universalisms is interesting in this context because it highlights once more the impossibility of an easy assimilation of Marx and Engels’s thought in *The German Ideology* with the positivist denial of standpoint. Stirner remarks that “fixed ideas” or “maxims” are the result of a false search for an Archimedean standpoint. He urges us to disavow the hope for a “permanent”

“outside” not only because a “foreign standpoint” is not a standpoint that anyone could conceivably have but also because the quest shackles us to an unattainable goal: “Heaven is the ‘standpoint’ from which the earth is moved, earthly doings surveyed and – despised. To assure to themselves heaven, to occupy the heavenly standpoint firmly and for ever – how painfully and tirelessly humanity struggled for this!” (*Ego*, 59). This can be viewed as a stab at the Kantian “categorical imperative.”⁶⁰⁸ It can also be related to the postmodern premise that the belief in a transcendent standpoint, Truth, is a belief in the transcendence of all standpoints, in an objective standpoint that is beyond particular standpoints.⁶⁰⁹ However, Marx and Engels point out, and in this respect formulate a critique of relativism⁶¹⁰, that “*the* maxim [to recognise] no maxims . . . the maxim not to have any firm standpoint” (*CW* 5, 163) is as much a standpoint as every other and that any assertion to the contrary is committing precisely the kind of error that Stirner wants eliminated: the metaphysics of the outside.

It seems what Marx and Engels are suggesting here is that any actual standpoint is necessarily a “firm” one in the sense that it is conditioned and conditioning, and that it is as subjective as it is objective in the sense that it is a reality that affects the individual. Marx and Engels do not maintain that theirs is a standpoint beyond all standpoints, an anti-standpoint, but rather that all standpoints, including their own, are things of *this* world. Stirner assumes that standpoints are points of view, that is, ideal position, and he wants to get rid of them in the name of an irreducible material subjectivity. Marx and Engels, on the other hand, argue that standpoints are just that: standing points, points of

⁶⁰⁸ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002).

⁶⁰⁹ See, for instance, Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1989]).

⁶¹⁰ One example of Stirner’s relativist approach is when he says that the child, the theologian, the critic, and the Peruvian priest Atahualpa all “judge correctly” in their interpretations of the Bible (*Ego*, 297).

location. The universality of standpoints thus conceived is a function of society, and because this is so, standpoints cannot be abrogated by an individual act of defiance: they work to “fix” the subject in a material position. By arguing that we must abandon (ideal) standpoints, Stirner forgets that theory and practice are based on (real) standpoints. Stirner declares that the “foreign standpoint is the *world of mind*, of ideas, thoughts, concepts, essences; it is *heaven*” and that if we did not allow this standpoint to determine us, “[t]hen it would end in the *dissolution of mind*, the dissolution of all thoughts, of all conceptions. . . . [W]e should now say, ‘we are indeed to have *mind*, but mind is not to have us’. Nevertheless it is only through the ‘flesh’ that I can break the tyranny of mind” (*Ego*, 60). Marx and Engels respond that people are not “prisoners” to the world of spirit *alias* “the absolute lord” and that the revolutionary does not need to remember the “flesh” (*Ego*, 59-60). Therefore, the “dissolution of mind” is not the kind of dissolution that revolutionary activity aims for. Remembering the flesh, at any rate, is an ideal injunction because it presupposes an act of consciousness and because flesh becomes abstract when imagined as existing apart from a social and historical standpoint.

As should be obvious by now, Marx and Engels did not in *The German Ideology* put any stock in the critique of indoctrination, which has been picked up again later in the most unlikely quarters. They systematically opposed Stirner’s claim that a set of ideal principles are “imparted” to us, “given” to us, or “drilled into us,” and that one must reject these principles in order to return to “one’s own” (*Ego*, 60-61). Curiously, it is precisely this approach that is now associated with ideology theory, a development which is at least partially due to the influence of Althusser’s theory of the interpellation elaborated in his famous essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes

towards an Investigation.” There, Althusser conceives of ideologies as the ideas of the dominant class with which the masses are inculcated via a set of realities Althusser calls the ISA, the ideological state apparatuses. These institutions work to guarantee the individual’s allegiance to the existing order by instilling in her the values, virtues, and know-how that make possible the reproduction of the relations of production. While there are “bad subjects” who refuse to recognize themselves in the prescribed roles, most of the time most everyone submits to the regime of representations that makes the *status quo* appear natural.⁶¹¹ This is ironic because it was Althusser who has fought the Young Hegelian elements of Marx’s thought in the most intellectually challenging manner. Despite Althusser’s insistence on the materiality and unconscious nature of ideology, the careful reader cannot but note a certain affinity between Stirner’s critique of indoctrination and Althusser’s concept of ideology defined as the “‘consciousness’ . . . [or the] the attitudes of the individual-subjects occupying the posts which the socio-technical division of labor assigns to them.”⁶¹² While it must be noted that Althusser’s approach is decidedly anti-humanist, which is apparent also in the fact that he views ideology as an eternally necessary mediation, it is clear that in some respects Althusser was closer to the project of Marx’s adversaries than he seemed to think.

In the Grip of Philosophy

If this chapter examines primarily Marx and Engels’s critique of Stirner, it is useful to remember that Marx and Engels do not commend Stirner on any of his ideas, taking great

⁶¹¹ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation,” in *Lenin and Philosophy*, 85-126. For another classic discussion of ideology as naturalization, see Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

⁶¹² Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” 124.

pains to scrutinize and refute each and every one of his arguments. Doing so, they are not laying the groundwork for a grand conspiracy against Stirner or initiating a tradition of self-deceit and repression à la Freud⁶¹³, but rather they simply adhere to the conventions of the genre. A contemporary reading of *The German Ideology*, however, must give some voice to the author of *Ego* and allow for the possibility of a positive interpretation of certain ideas. In this spirit, I shall highlight some aspects of Stirner's philosophy that worth considering in terms of their own merit, returning eventually, however, to Marx and Engels's negative assessment of Stirner's petty bourgeois German ideology.

Stirner advanced several insightful points that Marx and Engels strategically pass over in *The German Ideology*. His critique of Feuerbach and Young Hegelian philosophy in general is notable in its advocacy of a completely secularized understanding of history. At one point, Stirner states his case with great clarity: "To expel God from his heaven and to rob him of his '*transcendence*' cannot yet support a claim of complete victory, if therein he is only chased into the human breast and gifted with indelible *immanence*. Now they say, the divine is the truly human" (*Ego*, 47). It is this radical critique of humanism that forced Marx to subject his earlier ideas to a comprehensive revision. Those who wish to view Marx's thought as continuously humanist must ignore the deep impact of Stirner's challenge of Feuerbach on Marx. If the task, however, is to avoid papering over the lasting effect of this challenge and its profoundly troubling but also liberating implications, it is necessary to recognize the anti-humanism of the *German Ideology* as an important aspect of the thought of the mature Marx who never returned to the concept of "species-being" and the anthropology of "love."

⁶¹³ For such arguments, see Bernd A. Laska, *Ein heimlicher Hit: 150 Jahre Stirners "Einzigster": Eine kurze Editionsgeschichte*, Stirner Studien 1 (Nürnberg: LSR, 1994). Laska suggests, among other things, that Marx and Engels never meant to publish *The German Ideology* because they perceived Stirner's ideas as a threat that was better left unacknowledged and that Nietzsche systematically hid Stirner's influence on him.

Stirner's opposition to any and all idealist constructions was far-going, and even though Marx and Engels were able to show that his conclusion was neither free from idealism nor politically radical, he made the decisive move to maintain that philosophy, however secular in intent and content, is not automatically opposed to the metaphysics of transcendence. This was a forceful argument about the continuity between traditional religion and the critique of religion; as Stirner argues, "[t]he *spirit* remains the absolute lord . . . , and their only quarrel is over who shall occupy the hierarchical throne" (*Ego*, 60). Striving to make a break with this perpetual quarrel, Stirner looks forward to the "putrescence of the absolute spirit" (*CW* 5, 27) when he maintains that he shall "calmly look upon the stir with the certainty that the wild beasts of history will tear each other to pieces just like those of nature; [and that] their putrefying corpses fertilize the ground for – our crops" (*Ego*, 60). Marx and Engels make fun of him for imagining a Hegelian concept as a once living body in a state of decomposition, and yet they too took the critique of Hegel as a starting point in the development of their materialist approach to history. Stirner can be said to have perceived keenly the growing irrelevance of the project of Idealist philosophy.

However, Stirner's book was not only important for its attack on the quasi-religious underpinnings of post-Hegelian critical philosophy but also on the more immediately political liberal opposition to the state. Stirner took many well-articulated stabs at liberalism that are left uncommented by Marx and Engels. For instance, he poses the question of what constitutes effective resistance: "Why do certain *opposition parties* fail to flourish? Solely for the reason that they refuse to forsake the path of morality or legality" (*Ego*, 50). He points out that the "lawful opposition" can only work within the

parameters of the existing system, not change those parameters. Stirner continues to argue that the language of morality suggests harmony where there are opposing wills and stifles true change. But if “the moral relation is to be preserved above all[, w]hat is then left to the opposition?” Stirner accurately observes that the prohibition on non-legal and non-“moral” actions leaves the oppressed only with the hope or “wish” for freedom. However, Stirner opposes the wish and the will, maintaining that the resistance “may not *will* to have the freedom, it can only *wish* for it, “petition” for it, lisp a “please, please!” Marx and Engels object that the will, as conceived by Stirner, is not actual practice but rather a stronger form of wishful thinking, one that suggests that the individual has effectively extricated herself from the existing relation when she imagines it to be so.

Nonetheless, Stirner recognizes what might now be called the limits of democracy. The problem, he says, is that opposition can only be allowed so long as it does not actually undermine the dominant powers: “What would come of it, if the opposition really *willed*, willed with the full energy of the will? No, it must renounce *will* in order to live to *love*, renounce liberty – for love of morality. It may never “claim as a right” what it is permitted only to “beg as a favour” (*Ego*, 50). This is precisely the predicament of modern liberal democracies. Without making too much of the analogy, one might reveal here a counterintuitive connection between Stirner’s skepticism regarding the success of a “legal” opposition and Martin Luther King’s admonition of the white clergymen’s insistence upon using the “proper channels” (the court system) for fighting segregation and the white liberals’ advice to “Wait!” which amounts to a forever delayed resistance, i.e. “Never.”⁶¹⁴ The two perspectives are, of course, fundamentally

⁶¹⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., “*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*” & “*I Have a Dream*” (Atlanta, Ga.: Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1963).

distinct, especially with respect to the role of religion and the concept of justice, but one might argue that Stirner's mode of "(un)civil disobedience" retains a certain relevance in the contemporary context where the possibility of social change from within the system has remained an open question.

Returning to Marx and Engels, we should note that they do not specifically respond to Stirner's critical assaults on liberal oppositional politics, but they critically address Stirner's relation of power to regimes of morality and his insistence that revolution must be a rebellion against morality, an "immoral" act. Marx and Engels question the idea that the oppressed have no "will" to overthrow all moral precepts and cannot therefore change their conditions of existence. Rather, they argue, people find that material circumstances pre-exist them, limit their options, and subject them. People do not live according to moral injunctions, nor do they lack will. Stirner's preoccupation with the question of morality sidesteps the main determinants of social life and falsely presents historical subjects as if for generations they had done "nothing but squabble about the concept of morality" (*CW* 5, 168). In fact, it is this preoccupation with what is moral and immoral and how to break the alleged power of moral ideas that links Stirner with the liberal occlusion of the systemic nature of alienation as an economic reality. This reality, according to the historical materialism of Marx and Engels, cannot be overcome through a negation of ideal prescriptions. The illusion that a "will," i.e. a mental effort, is sufficient in the production of historical change is based on the idea that the existing state of affairs is the result of a magic trick which only needs to be exposed with the help of a sober mind.

Marx and Engels use the concept of the conjuring trick in order to indicate in an ironic manner that the magic that Stirner and the Young Hegelians claim to want to undo is in fact a product of their own doing. Stirner, in particular, is found guilty of using a variety of easy-to-see-through tricks that portray reality as devoid of concrete content and inhabited by nothing but spectral entities. For instance, in the “historical” section of his book, Stirner uses the abstraction of Mongolism to denote the supposedly idealist tendencies of modern civilization; high-flown abstract concepts like this, however, are simply conjuring tricks that mask the fact that there is no such thing as Mongolism and that modern people live their lives as producing and interacting beings just as all people in history have lived, only under specific conditions that can be grasped as making up a particular mode of production. To demonstrate how far removed Stirner’s speculations are from actually existing reality, they comment on Stirner’s “reflections on our Mongolism” (*Ego*, 62) by playing a pun on the German words *Himmel* and *Hämmel*: Stirner, they state, is “forgetting that actual Mongols are much more occupied with sheep [*Hämmel*] than with heaven [*Himmel*].” (*CW* 5, 167).

Another conjuring trick Marx and Engels discuss is the synecdoche (though they do not use this term), a literary device that functions here to give a distorted description of society. Just like the metonymy, the representation of the effect as the cause, the synecdoche turns reality inside out. For instance, in conflating medieval life and Christian theology, Stirner confuses “the religion of the Middle Ages . . . with the actual, profane Middle Ages in flesh and blood” (*CW* 5, 170), taking the part for the whole without being metaphorical. As a consequence, Stirner speaks continuously of “the people” when he should be using the terms “religion” or “philosophy.” Hence, Marx and Engels reiterate

their charge that “He has again taken as literal truth all the illusions of German speculative philosophy . . . For him there exists only the history of religion and philosophy – and this exists for him only through the medium of Hegel, who with the passage of time has become the universal crib, the reference source for all the latest German speculators about principles and manufacturers of systems” (*CW* 5, 171). In other words, an element of history, and, in Marx and Engels’s view, a marginal element or side-product of history, is assumed to be history itself. In this particular case, what seemed to Hegel and Stirner like the domination of the hierarchy was only the Church’s ideological response to “feudalism . . . [,] the political form of the medieval relations of production and intercourse” (*ibid.*, 176).

A kind of synecdoche is contained in Stirner’s ethnocentrism which portrays German thought as the authentic standard of all thought. Specifically, Stirner makes German philosophy out to be more advanced than all contemporary theoretical developments in France and England together. To underscore the parochialism of such an assumption, Marx and Engels note that just as the correlation of Protestantism with youth and (French) Catholicism with childhood are a clear case of nationalism, so is Stirner’s dismissal of (English) empirical philosophy as child-like (in contrast with German, speculative philosophy being youth-like) a bad imitation of Hegelian chauvinism. Further, Marx and Engels argue that Stirner’s projection of his particular intellectual environment onto the world at large is typical for a German philosopher who thinks his partial experience is the yardstick for all experience. Thus, Stirner protests against the “*dominion of thoughts, the dominion of mind*” (*Ego*, 68) and chastises Hegel for perpetrating the “the extremest case of violence on the part of thought, its highest pitch of

despotism and sole dominion . . . the *omnipotence of mind*' (ibid., 69). He holds Idealist philosophy responsible for social contradictions which for him take on the form of the rule of the "*cultured*" over the "*uncultured*" (ibid., 68).

Marx and Engels find that this idea is little more than a Platonic conceit, cultivated by the German philosophers, who not only believe the mind to be the particular domain of the Germans but also think of German Idealism as the pinnacle of civilization. Marx and Engels take Stirner to task on this issue. They begin with a critique of idealism when they state that "Jacques le bonhomme conceives history merely as the product of abstract thoughts . . . , which, in the final analysis, are all resolved into the "holy" (*CW* 5, 173). However, they go on to say, "This domination of the "holy," of thought, of the Hegelian absolute idea over the empirical world he further portrays as a historical relation existing at the present time, as the domination of the holy ones, the ideologists, over the vulgar world – as a *hierarchy* . . . the "domination" of the "world of thoughts" over the "world of things" (ibid.). This thesis of the "the real, actually existing domination of the thinkers" (ibid.) is absolutely false. As I have explained in the previous chapter, it is Marx and Engels's argument in *The German Ideology* that classes rule as material forces, not as intellectual forces. They indicate here that the critique of idealism has taken the wrong exit, so to speak, off the expressway toward materialist theory when it starts seeing signs pointing to "the domination of the speculative philosophers – over the world of things" (ibid.). It is also the point at which philosophical history and real history diverge. In Marx and Engels's words, Stirner's "view of modern history merely dilates upon speculative philosophy's old illusion of the domination of spirit in history. . . [when he] takes the world outlook derived from Hegel . . . as *the real world*" (*CW* 5, 173).

This is the context in which must place the multiple references to Stirner as a “virtuous” and “studious Berlin youth” (*CW* 5, 121, 122). Certainly, Marx and Engels mock Stirner, but they do so for a reason. They also provide a serious critique of philosophical parochialism, which, as we have already explored in detail, they explain as a product of the insular position of the thinker. Marx and Engels argue that even Stirner’s history of philosophy is extremely lopsided, focusing in an “exclusively national and local” manner on the Germans only. “If on occasion we appear to go outside Germany, it is only in order to cause the deeds and thoughts of other peoples, e.g., the French Revolution, to ‘reach their final goal’ in Germany . . . Only national-German facts are given, they are dealt with and interpreted in a national-German manner, and the result remains a national-German one” (*CW* 5, 184). They accuse him further of not looking beyond the circumscribed intellectual climate in Berlin for clues about theoretical advances and actual events: “The views and education of our saint are not only German, but of a Berlin nature through and through. The role allotted to Hegelian philosophy is that which it plays in Berlin, and Stirner confuses Berlin with the world and world history” (*ibid.*). Therefore, Stirner’s notion of idealism as a stage in history, the youth of history, is a direct product of Hegel’s influence in Berlin and the discourse among the “Free”: “The “youth” is a Berliner [and] the good citizens that we encounter throughout the book are Berlin beer-drinking philistines” (*CW* 5, 184-5). In other words, Stirner, the ideologist, is here tricked by his “premises,” his narrow environment that shapes his perceptions. These perceptions are that Hegelian philosophy is all powerful, that philosophical idealism has the world in a strangle-hold, and that history depends on it being toppled.

Yet another conjuring trick is what might be called presentism, which turns the past into a mere instrument of the historical present. It is a kind of teleological fallacy through which that which exists now is represented as the true expression of that which once existed, and that which once existed is represented as the rudimentary forms of that which exists now; the present, in other words, is seen as the past fulfilled. One critical discussion of this trick takes place near the point in the text where Marx and Engels develop their theory about the ruling ideas being the ideas of the ruling class, which was discussed earlier. (This is the section that was moved by Marx and Engels from here into the introduction. I have explained earlier that, in contradistinction to Stirner's claim that the idea of hierarchy produces social hierarchy or the rule of the ruling class, Marx and Engels argue that the idea of hierarchy is merely an expression of the rule of the ruling class. In other words, the idea of hierarchy is a ruling class idea and as such rules as an intellectual force insofar as it is a product of the material force of the ruling class. As an idea, however, it can only subject the realm of ideas to its rule, not the realm of practice, and the realm of practice in its turn produces a variety of ideas, including revolutionary ideas, which, all the same, depend wholly on the existence of a revolutionary class [*CW* 5, 60]). Here, Marx and Engels take up their discussion of the debt Stirner owes to Hegel and, having declared Stirner a mere "copier of Hegel" (*ibid.*, 170) who is even more "unhistorical" (*ibid.*, 174) in his constructions⁶¹⁵ than Hegel, they argue that Stirner took from Hegel the trick that makes "the later epoch . . . the 'truth' of the preceding one" (*ibid.*, 174). Marx and Engels relate this error to metonymy and ethnocentrism insofar as the contingent causal relationship between past and present is conventionally inverted in

⁶¹⁵ The phrases Marx and Engels use with reference to Stirner's Hegelianism are "childish (*CW* 5, 160), "trivial creative work in his copy of Hegelian ideology," "ignorance even of what he copies," and "hurried" (*ibid.*, 184-186).

German philosophy. According to them, Stirner's presentism is not extraordinary "since it has become the fashion among German theoreticians to give the name of the cause to the effect" (ibid., 175). Stirner, of course, does not help his case when he admits that his historical constructions lay no claim to authenticity⁶¹⁶ and thus gives Marx and Engels ample opportunity to call his work a "concoction out of Hegel" (ibid., 169) and his depiction of the past as the attempt of a Hegelian philosopher who thinks he "moves historical mountains" (ibid., 159).

Again, it should be stressed that Marx and Engels do not simply dismiss Stirner on account of his "plagiarism" and lack of historical understanding. If that had been the case, there indeed would not have been a need for them to write "Saint Max." Rather, they offer an explanation of these shortcomings and trace them to the reality of class structure and the division of labor. Therefore, they show that Stirner's faulty thinking is, to a large extent, due to social facts. At the same time, they hold him responsible not only for playing conjuring tricks but for failing to produce rigorous and original knowledge. That is why they consider Hegel the better thinker despite the fact that he was an ideologist too: "If, like Hegel, one designs such a system for the first time . . . one cannot possibly do so without comprehensive, positive knowledge, without great energy and keen insight and without dealing at least in some passages with empirical history. On the other hand, if one is satisfied with exploiting an already existing pattern, transforming it for one's 'own' purposes . . . then absolutely no knowledge of history is necessary" (ibid., 176).

⁶¹⁶ About his "historical reflections," for instance, Stirner says that they "are not given with the claim of thoroughness, or even of approved soundness, but solely because it seems to me that they may contribute towards making the rest clear" (*Ego*, 62); see *CW* 5, 163.

One effect of the false universalization of philosophical idealism is that Stirner eradicates the (real) difference between theory and practice. This point is particularly interesting because it rests on the Marxian observation that the unity of theory and practice is not a given. Stirner, however, does not recognize social practice as distinct in actuality from theory. For this reason, he makes what for Marx and Engels was the crucial mistake of seeing idealist philosophies everywhere, even in the activities of revolutionary movements. Commenting on the French Revolution, for example, Stirner parrots conservative platitudes that are a far cry from the critical theory he says he is advocating when he argues that Robespierre and Saint-Just were the intellectual relatives of Popes Innocent III and Gregory VII. According to Stirner, it is ironic and yet only logical that the “idealist priests,” who were serving man, ended up cutting off the heads of real *men* (*Ego*, 74). For Stirner, this proves the power of an illusion, that there is a higher truth called “man” that exists outside of and in spite of individual “men.” For Marx, Stirner’s reduction of the Terror to a fanaticist ideology, to use his own term, proves that Marx and Engels argue that “[t]his, of course, saves Saint Max the trouble of wasting even one ‘unique’ little word about the actual, empirical grounds for the cutting off of heads—grounds which were based on extremely worldly interests” (*CW* 5, 178), by which they are referring, of course, to the Jacobins’ purges aimed at suppressing the counter-revolutionary forces. Thus, when Stirner calls for the end of what he takes to be the “actually existing domination of the thinkers” (*Ego*, 173), he fails not only to recognize the difference between a revolutionary leader acting in the here and now of a decisive political struggle and a philosopher or theologian reflecting on ideal forms and

the beyond from the safe position of the ivory tower, but also to analyze the specific power relations at work at a particular historical juncture.

On the side of theory, Stirner systematically elides the differences between science and religion. Science, for him, is just like religion, and in this respect he is a kind of proto-postmodernist as well. Marx and Engels on the one hand and Stirner on the other agree that traditional philosophy shares with religion a basic idealism; however, Stirner argues further that science is no different from philosophy. He thus maintains that Descartes and Luther are two sides of the same coin and that science is nothing but an extension of idealist philosophy and its (Christian) dictum that, “I am not my flesh, but *I* am *mind*, only mind” (ibid.). Drawing a connection between Cartesian and Hegelian philosophy, Stirner observes that since Descartes “a serious effort [has] been made to bring Christianity to complete efficacy by exalting the ‘scientific consciousness’ to be the only true and valid one” (*Ego*, 78). This hegemony of consciousness, according to Stirner, “begins with . . . turning away from everything that “mind,” “thought,” does not legitimate. . . [,] and it does not rest until it has brought reason into everything, and can say ‘The actual is the rational, and only the rational is the actual’” (ibid.).

Marx and Engels might have been able to appreciate the rationalist link between Descartes and Hegel, and the critique thereof, had it not been for Stirner’s collapse of the differences between the two thinkers, a collapse that contradicts even Stirner’s own equation of Catholicism and “things,” as opposed to the supposed affinity between Protestantism and “spirit.” Marx and Engels do not here comment on the science-religion conflation, but they indicate their disbelief in the wry remark that the reader should have a look at Stirner’s transformation of “Descartes into a German philosopher” (*Ego*, 172).

On the side of practice, Stirner confuses institutions and behavior with basic economic relations and is thus mystified as to why certain social forms can continue to exist even if their principles are violated in every day life. One example for this is Stirner's inability to grasp the persistent reality of the family. As indicated, the Marxian critique of "Saint Max" boils down to the claim that German philosophy, more than any other, always begins with the idea and does not recognize reality as separate from the mediations of consciousness. This is why every contradiction is explained *via* recourse to concepts. With respect to the family as an institution, Stirner maintains that, even though it has been abolished in practice, the "holy" concept of the family continues to oppress people: "Released from dependence as regards the existing family, one falls into the more binding dependence on the idea of the family; one is ruled by the spirit of the family" (*Ego*, 80). In the fourth "Thesis on Feuerbach," Marx had argued the other way around: "[O]nce the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be criticised in theory and transformed in practice" (*CW* 5, 7). In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels explain this by saying the *concept* of the family has long been abolished among the "dissolute bourgeois" (*ibid.*, 180). However, the material basis of the family has been preserved because it is also the basis of the capitalist order, namely private property. Thus, Marx and Engels charge, "Here again our good man perceived the domination of the holy where entirely empirical relations dominate. . . . The dissolute bourgeois . . . [violated all principles of morality, b]ut marriage, property, the family remain untouched in theory, because they are the practical basis on which the bourgeoisie has erected its domination" (*CW*, 180). The (oppressive) relations that characterize the family, then, will be eradicated with the abolition of private property.

However, Marx and Engels go further to emphasize that the ideal of the family is a ruling class concept that is not shared by the working class. Workers' families, that is, do not, and cannot, organize their lives according to some fantasy: "Where the family is *actually* abolished, as with the proletariat, just the opposite of what 'Stirner' thinks takes place. There the concept of the family does not exist at all, but here and there family affection based on extremely real relations is certainly to be found" (*CW*, 180-1). These real relations have their roots outside individual institutions in the economic basis of the society. As this economic basis changes, institutions change along with it: "In the eighteenth century the concept of the family was abolished by the philosophers, because the actual family was already in the process of dissolution at the highest pinnacles of civilisation. The internal family bond, the separate components constituting the concept of the family were dissolved, for example, obedience, piety, fidelity in marriage, etc." (*ibid.*). However, as long as class society prevails, and specifically as long as capitalist private property dominates social relations, the family will persist: "[T]he real body of the family, the property relation, the exclusive attitude in relation to other families, forced cohabitation – relations determined by the existence of children, the structure of modern towns, the formation of capital, etc." will be structurally preserved (despite "numerous violations," precisely "because the existence of the family is made necessary by its connection with the mode of production, which exists independently of the will of bourgeois society" (*ibid.*).

Marx and Engels suggest here that only the proletariat can abolish the family actuality because it is the proletariat that will revolutionize the mode of production. Once the real relations that dictate the people's lives are abolished, the superstructural

arrangements, also produced by these real relations, will be abolished as well. Stirner assumes the opposite: He maintains in the tradition of critical philosophy that society is held together by certain ideas and when these ideas are exchanged for another set of ideas, society as we know it will collapse. According to Marx and Engels, this is an “ideological delusion.” Stirner takes “as the actual, earthly basis of the bourgeois world the distorted form in which the sanctimonious and hypocritical ideology of the bourgeoisie voices their particular interests as universal interests” (ibid., 180). In other words, because the bourgeois world rests on the institution of private property (with the family being an extension of it), the bourgeois has to portray this particular institution as a universal one while violating its principles in practice. For the proletarians, however, it will continue to exercise a material force – until they manage to overcome the institution of private property historically. In effect, Marx and Engels maintain that it is not a matter of resisting the “secret police” of “conscience,” enforcing its laws through “inward servitude” (*Ego*, 81), but of revolutionizing the blatant and clearly evident oppression inherent in class rule, specifically the rule of the bourgeoisie, the rule of private property.

The upshot of German philosophy is, as Feuerbach suggested, the inversion of subject-predicate relationship. Just as the Christian God was the projection of human predicates onto an imagined super-subject, so did German philosophy turn the realm of “spirit” into not one but *the* agent of history. Marx and Engels find little fault with this initial Feuerbachian proposition. Hence, they would have agreed with Stirner’s observation that the Lutheran drive to “*hallow* everything worldly” is indeed the pinnacle of the “Christian *contempt for the world*” (*Ego*, 84-5). They also did not dispute Stirner’s argument that Hegel’s philosophy did not fundamentally break with the religious distaste

for profane reality (ibid., 85-8) or that Young Hegelian liberalism only managed to exchange one set of abstractions for another (ibid., 87-8). However, they do contest his insistence that “[n]ow nothing but *mind* rules the world” (ibid., 88). Mind, according to Marx and Engels, rules only in the minds of the ideologists. Like Feuerbach, Stirner advocates wresting power away from the ideal Subject and restoring that power to the only true subjects, human beings. But Marx and Engels find ludicrous Stirner’s call that we “*devour the sacred*” and “make it our *own*” (ibid., 89) because the mass of people never forsook their agency and power. To the contrary, their productivity and their activity are the movement that is called history, and, regardless of what people believed, it could never have been otherwise. Hence, Marx and Engels also find unacceptable Stirner’s notion that a subjective entity called Spirit has struggled for dominance and has succeeded in achieving it. In the final analysis, then, it becomes clear that Stirner too inverts subjects and predicates when he takes the attribute of being able to think and turns it into a subject which, under names like “clericalism” and “scholasticism,” directs the course of events. Real-life persons, on the other hand, become simply embodiments of this transcendent Subject (*CW*, 177): In Stirner’s history, “no individuals . . . make their appearance, but only ossified, crippled thoughts and Hegelian changelings” (ibid., 186).

By universalizing his own experience in the realm of mental labor, Stirner makes it seem as if the predicament of German philosophy was the predicament of all the world and therefore misconceives the nature of the historical dialectic. Marx and Engels summarize the process like this:

So, after the ideologists had assumed that ideas and thoughts had dominated history up to now, that the history of these ideas and thoughts constitutes all history up to now, after they had imagined that real conditions had conformed to man *as such* and his ideal conditions, i.e., to conceptual determinations, after they

had made the history of people's consciousness of themselves the basis of their actual history, after all this, nothing was easier than to call the history of consciousness, of ideas, of the holy, of established concepts – the history of “man” and to put it in the place of real history. (Ibid., 184)

Because Stirner fails to understand the origin and structure of modern society, he also fails to understand the conditions for its revolutionary transformation. Having “transformed *modern times* into *modern philosophy*” (ibid., 183) in his mind, he wages a battle against thoughts and cannot see that was he who has “transformed the world into thoughts” in the first place. The “holy warrior” is engaged in a “struggle against the holy” (ibid.), a quixotic enterprise that must appear made from the standpoint of prosaic reality from which it is systemically removed. What's more, Stirner treats consciousness as his lance, believing that he will defeat the enemy by refusing to recognize him. In Marx and Engels's terms, Stirner “achieves his heroic feats by *perceiving* the entire opposing host of thoughts in its nullity and vanity” (ibid., 191). The paradox here is that Stirner conjures his specters only in order to then conjure them away – all of it taking place in the realm of mind. The result is a subjectivism that leaves objective reality untouched: Stirner “leaves everything existing as it was, changing only his conception, and that not even of things, but of philosophical phrases about things” (ibid., 192).

In my discussion of “III. Saint Max” thus far, I have shown that Stirner's book provided the occasion for Marx and Engels to develop and refine their ideas about bourgeois society further. If Marx had already conceived of alienation in modern society as a problem fundamentally linked to labor, he now specifies the nature of alienation affecting one particular kind of labor: mental labor. In *The German Ideology*, Marx no longer makes recourse to abstract concepts like the human essence, but he retains the notion of the estrangement between human activity, here specifically the theoretical

activity of the philosopher, and the products of that activity, here philosophical constructs. However, with the help of the concept of the *historical* division of labor, Marx now fully rejects the Hegelian premise that labor is necessarily alienating, thus preparing the theoretical trajectory that generated the idea of commodity fetishism. The notion that things produced under the rule of capital confront the worker as alien entities, was prefigured more explicitly (than in the ahistorical concept of *Veräußerung*) in the concept of purely intellectual labor. Moreover, *The German Ideology* constitutes an advance over earlier works insofar as it absorbs theoretical consciousness into the social process and relates it to economic relations that are predicated on class structure and the division of labor.

It is also possible to see the Brussels Manuscripts as the counterpart of the Paris Manuscripts in the sense that one set of texts focuses on the predicament of the working class, and the other set deals specifically with that peculiar liminal class, the “petty bourgeoisie.” *Capital*, of course, is primarily an examination of bourgeois interests in the strict sense of the term, that is, the interests of the owners of the means of production. The problems with the concept of the petty bourgeoisie are many, and we cannot hope to discuss them here. However, it should be apparent from the analysis so far that the alienation of the thinker springs not from the fact that all his motivations are geared towards the maximization of profit (which is the case for the capitalist) but from the fact that his “occupation” is limited. The critic is a worker of sorts, but in terms of his economic and political position he lies outside of the revolutionary class, the proletariat. One might argue that the concept of ideology served a pivotal role in Marx’s emergent theoretical clarity on the question of what specifically defines the proletariat as a class.

The ideologist whom Marx and Engels had in mind, that is, is not forced to sell his labor power and, more importantly in the present context, is therefore not inclined and even loathe to accept the painful, messy, and practical quality of revolutionary struggle.

CHAPTER 7

Defending Communism: Marx and Engels's Case Against Possessive Individualism

While chapter 6 was concerned primarily with the Marxian discussion of Stirner's philosophical *Eskamotagen*, I will turn in this final analysis toward Marx and Engels's interpretations of the more specifically political critique of Stirner's individualist materialism. The aestheticization of history and the retreat into the "spectral" regions of criticism lead for Stirner to the complete dismissal of the communists' "cause." For Stirner, socialism is only another ideal just like religion or liberalism. This is, of course, an argument that Marx and Engels must come to terms with and refute compellingly because if it can be shown that communism is in fact a "utopia" devised by the King's counselor⁶¹⁷, then Marx and Engels should reject it as an empty abstraction. However, their experience in France had convinced them that this was not the case.

In refuting Stirner, Marx made manifest a change in his theoretical understanding of the nature of the historical dialectic. This change had occurred in his encounter with the French communists. Marx's new, practice-oriented perspective, which brought with it a radically altered conception of the role of philosophy, required him to make explicit his commitment to the study of the conditions of historical transformation in the present. I would argue that Marx's decision to transition to the critique of bourgeois political

⁶¹⁷ Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. by Clarence S. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

economy and, ultimately, to the scientific study of capitalism, was solidified in the course of the methodological clarification that took shape in the *Streit* with Stirner. While Marx and Engels's analysis in *The German Ideology* is not concerned with the specific laws of capital, but rather with class society generally, they enunciate a concept of revolutionary practice here that remained one of the cornerstones of Marx's mature thought.

As Stirner moves into a confrontation with what he views as three versions of modern liberal myth-making, Marx and Engels have to engage in a thorough debate over revolutionary politics, communism, and criticism. They apparently welcome the opportunity to formulate their own theoretical approach in contrast to Stirner's anarchic individualism. On the surface, it appears that they merely reverse the charge Stirner makes when he claims that what presents itself as a radical alternative to traditional philosophy is really just a rehashing of German idealist thought. In order to determine whether and how Marx and Engels do more than that, it is necessary to examine the charge itself. A Young Hegelian gesture par excellence, the critique put forth by Stirner is aimed at "the more modern and most modern of the 'moderns'" (*Ego*, 89). Distancing himself from the group of Berlin radicals "The Free," he launches an all-out attack on the whole gamut of what he calls "political liberalism," "social liberalism," and "humane liberalism." His assessment is that while progressives of all stripes have in fact replaced "divine" concepts with "human" ones, "ecclesiastical" concepts with "political" ones, "doctrinal" concepts with "scientific" ones, and "crude dogmas and precepts" with "eternal laws," these concepts are concepts nonetheless (*ibid.*, 88) and concepts, moreover, that own us, rather than concepts owned by us.

Liberalism and Its Discontents

“Political liberalism,” by which Stirner means modern republicanism and constitutionalism, is first on Stirner’s list as he sets out to criticize *concepts* like “the state,” “general interest,” “common welfare,” “the sovereign nation,” “rights,” “citizenship,” and “reason.” According to Stirner, all bourgeois talk about liberty and equality is yet another form of servitude (ibid., 95). Serving a cause—the “thought of humanity”—the politically “free” are anything but free; they are the obedient slaves to a new master, they are “zealots” (ibid., 96), and their “affairs” (ibid., 97) are “despots” (ibid.) more tyrannical than any absolute ruler. While one can see why Marx and Engels would object to this, it is also notable that Marx and Engels do not appreciate some of the more penetrating insights presented by Stirner. The notion, for example, that bourgeois law designed to counter “tyranny,” i.e. a “totalitarian” abuse of power, ends up reinforcing its own, equally dictatorial, coercive regime (ibid., 98), is a forceful, if undeveloped, idea that has never lost its relevance.⁶¹⁸ Stirner also maintains that poverty is not in contradiction with but rather a necessary ingredient of bourgeois society (ibid., 102), that philanthropy is based on a deep fear of rebellion, and that the state protects the “possessors,” the privileged who in turn are loyal to the state.

One commentator suggested that the paradoxical nature of Stirner’s critique is that it is a bourgeois critique of bourgeois society. This may seem counter-intuitive but contains a kernel of truth. It is true that even the most ardent anarchist today would view Stirner’s idea that it is the “*Bürgerstaat*,” rather than the capitalists, that exploits workers

⁶¹⁸ Here, one might draw a parallel to contemporary arguments about the totalitarian nature of the so-called liberal democracies. See, for example, Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* (London: Verso, 2001).

and lives on the “*slavery of labour*” (ibid., 104-5) as wrong-headed. However, it is possible to explain this view in terms of the economic state of Germany in the early nineteenth century. Marx and Engels persistently link Germany’s underdevelopment with its intellectual scene, an argument that can be used also to account for Stirner’s inability to see that the bourgeois state would become a mere function of capital. Ironically, even before a distinct German bourgeoisie had had a chance to fully constitute itself, the critique of the state was already profoundly bourgeois insofar as it ostensibly rejected central power in favor of unfettered “individuality.” In this light, Stirner’s anti-liberalism appears merely as a different refraction of the bourgeois cult of the self-interested, exchanging, and profit-maximizing *homo oeconomicus*. Robert Kurz says that liberalism’s critique of authoritarianism was only a kind of “patricide within the same historico-social constellation”⁶¹⁹; in this context, one wants to add that the individualist critique of the state was or is only an attempted patricide.

In other respects, Stirner’s ideas can be argued to have been more radical than Marx and Engels make them out to be. For instance, Stirner asserts the revolutionary power of the dispossessed— even though Stirner’s definition of the proletariat is closer to what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have called the “multitude” than to Marx’s definition which is directly linked to industrial labor. Indeed, there are some interesting parallels between certain contemporary watchwords such as, most recently, the concept of the “nomad” (or the migrant, the nation-less, the home-less)⁶²⁰, and what Stirner calls the “extravagant vagabonds” (*Ego*, 102) or the “class of the unstable, restless,

⁶¹⁹ Robert Kurz, *Schwarzbuch Kapitalismus: Ein Abgesang auf die Marktwirtschaft* (Frankfurt a.M.: Eichborn, 1999); translation mine.

⁶²⁰ See Richard Barbrook’s *The Class of the New* (San Francisco: OpenMute, <http://www.theclassofthenew.net>) for an overview of the literature on the new character of the labor of the future.

changeable” (ibid.). Therefore, when viewed from a post-Marxist perspective, Stirner’s approach seems eerily prescient. However, his optimistic assessment of the inherent transformative activities of marginalized groups regardless of their specific position within global capitalism was challenged by Marx and Engels then just as Deleuzian “nomadology” is criticized by Marxists today as insufficiently differentiated (despite, ironically, its emphasis on difference).⁶²¹ From Marx’s perspective, based on the assumption of Germany’s imminent entry into industrial capitalism, conceiving the revolutionary subject apart from a consideration of the central conflict between capital and wage labor was unhistorical and romantic. They take particular issue with Stirner’s identification of pauperism and the proletariat (*CW* 5, 202). Marx and Engels’s argument that the *Lumpenproletariat* tends towards reactionary political alignments is, of course, well-known.⁶²² Perhaps even more problematically for Marx and Engels, Stirner appears to view students as the paradigmatic bearer of rebellion and resistance, an idea that attests to their fundamentally different understandings of the nature of oppression.⁶²³ The concept of the petty bourgeoisie, I would argue, functions for Marx and Engels to clarify at this point in their thinking the key role of the relations of production in the dialectic of history. Far from being simply a dumping ground for any problems with the theory of class struggle, as some have claimed⁶²⁴, the concept of the petty-bourgeois philosopher serves Marx and Engels to undermine the Young Hegelian belief in the “world-shattering” (*CW* 5, 23) effects of critical philosophy. Some post-Fordist theorists would

⁶²¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

⁶²² It is in *The German Ideology* where Marx and Engels first use the term (*CW* 5, 202; see also ibid., 84: “ragged proletariat”).

⁶²³ When positing this, Stirner likely had in mind the *Burschenschaften*, which I discussed earlier.

⁶²⁴ Wolfgang Eßbach, *Gegenzüge: Der Materialismus des Selbst und seine Ausgrenzung aus dem Marxismus – eine Studie über die Kontroverse zwischen Max Stirner und Karl Marx* (Frankfurt a.M., Materialis, 1982).

argue that history proved Marx's postulate of the proletariat as the agent of the next world revolution wrong and that contemporary visions of revolution must include "immaterial labor," contract and illegal labor, as well as intellectual labor. Stirner could readily be recruited to support this case.⁶²⁵

This difference in the definition of revolutionary agency translates into a difference in the way that revolution is treated as a fact of history. Stirner and Marx both anticipate the final emancipation of the human individual. However, Marx deduces this event historically, namely from the successes of past struggles for emancipation, whereas Stirner conceives the future as a categorically distinct state of being that must occur out of a logical necessity, that is, because, in his interpretation of Hegel's dialectic, it is the third term in the triad, the synthesis of body and mind. Stirner asserts that, apart from the transformation from realism to idealism, there has never been a revolution in history. This may be partly due to the fact that self-interested and consciously acting individuals have never existed for Stirner. Hence, he can maintain that it is not until we stand at the entrance of the era of egoism, the era of the concretely corporeal ego, that such a revolution will take place. From Marx and Engels's perspective, which rests on the notion of history as a succession of revolutionary transformations, Stirner's first historical act looks like a *coup d'état* orchestrated by Spirit itself, and the second historical act (prophesied by Stirner) appears as an abstract metamorphosis of "consciousness" with the "rabble" ceasing to be a rabble as soon as it gives up the "dogma" that it is a rabble. (*Ego*, 229). According to Stirner, change will not occur until people give up their "dread of taking hold" (*ibid.*). In contrast, Marx and Engels maintain that the history (or prehistory)

⁶²⁵ One major difference between, say, Deleuze and Guattari's work and Stirner, however, is the importance of the individual. Whereas the former take a Spinozist approach to the question of resistance, defining the subject of rhizomatic movements as a collective one, the latter begins and ends with the isolated ego.

of humankind is nothing but the result of people taking hold of and transforming the material conditions of their existence.

There are consequences for the respective theories of the contradiction between partial and common interests. His ideas about the equally oppressive nature of all institutionalized forms of sociality lead Stirner to assert that social transformations which have replaced one set of particular interests with another set of particular interests were not transformations at all. Thus, he argues that hitherto, power has merely changed hands and that humans are just as far from universal liberation as they were at the beginning of history. With respect to the French revolution, for example, he says that it

was not directed against *the established*, but against the *establishment in question*, against a *particular* establishment. It did away with *this* ruler, not with *the* ruler. . . .

To this day the revolutionary principle has gone no further than to assail only *one or another* particular establishment, to be *reformatory*. Much as may be *improved* . . . always there is only a *new master* set in the old one's place, and the overturning is a – building up. (*Ego*, 100)

This assessment is notably different from Marx and Engels's argument that every new ruling class represents the general interest ever more fully (*CW* 5, 61) and constitutes a qualitative change in the social and economic organization. The individual is not free when all common interests are destroyed; rather, the struggle for universality frees individuals. This struggle is carried out by actual individuals, however alienated they may be. For Marx and Engels, alienation does not mean that individuals do not exist; in Althusserian language, individuals may be subjected, but they are nonetheless subjects. (In fact, it is their very subjection that imbues them with a particular kind of subjectivity.) Therefore, they charge that "[t]his 'ego' of Stirner's [philosophy] . . . [is] not a 'corporeal individual,' but a category constructed on the Hegelian method" (*ibid.*, 192). It is because

Stirner locates revolutionary agency in a hypothetical individual which is to spontaneously generate itself, rather than actual individuals living and working in a particular society, that he fails to recognize communism as a revolutionary movement.

At the bottom of Stirner's anti-communism is his refusal to recognize class as a reality and force of history. To shore up their case, Marx and Engels argue that this is because economic and political fragmentation in Germany did not allow for the rise of a genuine bourgeois class. Because of this, the bourgeois state had to appear like an abstraction or artificial and forced construct. In Marx and Engels's words, "[t]he key to the criticism of liberalism advanced by Saint Max and his predecessors is the history of the German bourgeoisie," and, put more polemically, "the impotence, depression and wretchedness of the German burghers, whose petty bourgeois interests were never capable of developing into the common, national interests of a class" (*CW* 5, 193-194). Philosophy imported the ideas of liberalism from England and France, but if Kant's categorical imperative ("good will") expressed the disconnect between reality and the Enlightenment in Germany, so did Stirner's call for the end of all imperatives express the disjuncture between the philosophical critique of bourgeois rule and the non-existence of a revolutionary bourgeoisie in Germany. Therefore, both the postulation and the rejection of universal interests remained stuck in ideology.

Kant, then, before Hegel, was a prototype of the German ideology. Kant's philosophy was paradigmatic because it was "[t]he characteristic form which French liberalism, based on real class interests, assumed in Germany" (*CW* 5, 195). Marx and Engels criticize Kant because they consider him a "whitewashing spokesman" of the "German middle class" (*ibid.*). They maintain that Kant adopted bourgeois ideas without

realizing that they were attached to a bourgeois class and its class interests, for not noticing “that these theoretical ideas of the bourgeoisie had as their basis material interests and a *will* that was conditioned and determined by the material relations of production” (ibid.). By separating bourgeois “theoretical expressions” from what they expressed, he “made the materially motivated determinations of the will of the French bourgeois into *pure* self-determinations of “*free will*,” of the will in and for itself, of the human will, and so converted it into purely ideological conceptual determinations and moral postulates” (ibid.). The result of this was that Kant aestheticized the categories of the bourgeoisie as if they were ahistorical truths, rather than notions borne of violent class struggle and the murderous greed of what Marx later called “primitive accumulation.” Once confronted with these realities, the philosopher is surprised: “Hence the German petty bourgeois recoiled in horror from the practice of this energetic bourgeois liberalism as soon as this practice showed itself, both in the Reign of Terror and in shameless bourgeois profit-making” (ibid.).

Similarly, Stirner’s critique of liberalism as a mere ideal constructs is thus a specific result of the fact that there had not been a bourgeois revolution in Germany: “Since German economic relations had by no means reached the state of development to which these political forms corresponded, the middle class accepted them merely as abstract ideas, principles valid in and for themselves, pious wishes and phrases, Kantian self-determinations of the will and of human beings as they ought to be” (*CW* 5, 196). Moreover, the development of an enormously distended bureaucracy under the absolute monarchy had produced the appearance that the state was an independent force (*CW* 5, 195). Therefore, if Stirner sees bourgeois liberalism as nothing but a bad dream, then

does not speak about its historical reality: “If, like the Berlin ideologists, one judges liberalism and the state within the framework of local German impressions, or limits oneself merely to criticism of German-bourgeois illusions about liberalism, instead of seeing the correlation of liberalism with the real interests from which it originated and without which it cannot really exist – then, of course, one arrives at the most banal conclusions” (*CW* 5, 196).

Because of this uneven economic and political development in Western Europe, Stirner’s critique of the bourgeoisie applies to German *Bürgertum* but not to the emerging capitalist class in France and England. Thus, in his “ideological reflections about *real* liberalism,” Stirner speculates that the “political liberals” are nothing but passive “good burghers” who quietly serve a quasi-religious ideal. According to Marx and Engels, nothing could be further from the truth beyond the borders of Germany: the Revolution was not a discourse over general philosophical ideas but a struggle over concrete interests. According to Marx and Engels, Stirner “sees here merely the solution of a theoretical question; he takes the Constituent Assembly, six days before the storming of the Bastille, for a council of *church fathers* debating a point of dogma!” (*CW* 5, 199). In reality, the French bourgeois class had little in common with the *Biedermeier* of the German Restoration, whom Stirner accuses of mediocrity and of being obedient to the idea of reason; rather, it consisted of an aggressive, profit-seeking capitalist class that had overthrown the aristocracy in its attempt to achieve dominance (*ibid.*, 201). As the reader will appreciate, Marx and Engels articulate here a notion of capitalism as dynamic and

revolutionary, which would reappear in their later works and which has since been extensively problematized in the Marxist literature.⁶²⁶

To a certain extent, Stirner does grasp the fundamental conflict between laborers and capitalists, the close connection between capitalism and the bourgeois state, and the paradoxical nature of “free” labor. In fact, given that Stirner uses some of the same terms and concepts that Marx and Engels use, it seems unfair that his elaborations on the proletarian “who has nothing to lose” (*Ego*, 104) should earn him the epithet of “simpleton” (*CW* 5, 203). In fact, Stirner makes a number of points that are not altogether foreign to Marx’s arguments. For example, he says that “the non-possessor will regard the state as a power protecting the possessor, which privileges the latter, but does nothing for him, the non-possessor, but to – suck his blood” (*Ego*, 104). Certainly, for Marx and Engels, it is not a question of the working class *regarding* things in this manner; it is simply a fact. However, Stirner claims further that “the labourers always fall into the hands of the possessors” (*ibid.*). He even maintains that the exchange of labor for a wage is essentially unequal: “The labourer cannot *realize* on his labour to the extent of the value that it has for the consumer. ‘Labour is badly paid!’ The capitalist has the greatest profit from it” (*ibid.*). Finally, Stirner draws the political conclusion that the class of laborers “remains a power hostile to this state, this state of possessors” (*ibid.*). Stirner even goes so far as to say that, because labor “is not recognized as to its *value*; it is exploited,” and because the laborers want to get a fair return for their work, “[t]he labourers have the most enormous power in their hands” (*Ego*, 104).

⁶²⁶ The idea of capitalism as an auto-subject has been widely rejected by contemporary thinkers, as has the notion that capitalism’s toll on humanity can be conceived as progressive in any way whatsoever.

Contained in these assertions are a concept of exploitation, a notion of the difference between the value produced and the wage paid, and an understanding of the labor struggle as powerful social force. These ideas resemble Marx and Engels's socialism in tone. However, differences emerge in Stirner's exclusive focus on the state. Claiming that the laborers are not aware of their situation, he argues, "[I]f they once became thoroughly conscious of it and used it, nothing would withstand them; they would only have to stop labour, regard the product of labour as theirs, and enjoy it. This is the sense of the labour disturbances which show themselves here and there. The state rests on the – *slavery of labour*. If *labour* becomes *free*, the state is lost" (*Ego*, 104-5)." While, in other words, it appears as though Stirner shares with Marx and Engels the identification of the end of subjugation with free productive activity, he has a fundamentally different understanding of the process by which this liberation is to be achieved.

Most importantly, Stirner overestimates the independent power of the State. He assumes that the State is exploiting workers and that workers are practically enslaved by the State. This is, of course, wrong-headed in Marx and Engels's eyes because the principal conflict in bourgeois society is that between the working class and the capitalist class. Once the capitalist class loses its power, the bourgeois State falls away. Moreover, Marx and Engels point out that the abolition of the State will not make labor "free." Under the rule of capital, workers are unlike slaves because they are already formally free. Therefore, only the abolition of capitalism can turn apparent freedom into real freedom. In order to distinguish their concept of free activity from Stirner's, Marx and Engels maintain, "Labour *is* free in all civilised countries; it is not a matter of freeing

labour but of abolishing it” (*CW* 5, 205). The idea of the abolition of labor is one that Marx is known to have relinquished later on. Without exploring this problem in too much detail here, it is clear that Marx did not mean the abolition of production *per se* but rather, as one recent commentator has put it, “a transformation of the prevailing mode of production into a new mode that can no longer be termed ‘labour.’”⁶²⁷ Not only, then, do Marx and Engels respond differently to the question of who is oppressing the worker, they are also aware that oppression in the capitalist mode of production is far less obvious and explicit than the relations of subjugation in the feudal mode of production, expressed, for example, in direct bondage. Under these new conditions, then, real freedom is the negation of bourgeois individual freedom.

The most fundamental source of disagreement between Stirner on the one hand and Marx and Engels on the other is the question of whence arises the misery of the working masses. Stirner explains the problem by imputing to society the “error” of imagining that “Money governs the world” (*Ego*, 103). Thus, he asserts, “If an age is imbued with an error, some always derive advantage from the error, while the rest have to suffer from it. Commoner and labourer believe in the ‘truth’ of *money*; they who do not possess it believe in it no less than those who possess it: the laymen, therefore, as well as the priests” (ibid.). This, for Marx and Engels, is idealism *par excellence*. After all, Stirner implies that simply by suspending the “truth of money,” social reality will transform itself. Thus, they criticize Stirner: “Jacques le bonhomme imagines that it is in the power of the ‘burghers’ and ‘workers’ . . . suddenly, one fine day, to put on record their ‘disbelief’ in the ‘truth of money’” (*CW* 5, 203). According to Marx and Engels,

⁶²⁷ Uri Zilberscheid, “The Vicissitudes of the Idea of the Abolition of Labour in Marx’s Teachings: Can the Idea be Revived?,” 2, in *Critique* 35: 115-150. Also see ibid., *Jenseits der Arbeit. Der vergessene sozialistische Traum von Marx, Fromm, und Marcuse* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999).

however, “money is a necessary product of definite relations of production and intercourse and remains a “truth” so long as these relations exist” (ibid.). If people actually behave as if “money makes the world go round,” they do so not because they are deluded but because economic value does indeed shape reality under capitalism.

Thus, in Marx’s later language, what rears itself up over the workers is their objective reality: the commodity, dead labor, value. Money in the form of self-valorizing capital is the heart of that reality, and it dominates the workers as an alien force imbued seemingly with its own will.⁶²⁸ In the final analysis, Marx and Engels answer the question of the origin of alienation by pointing to objective conditions (which Marx does not analyze systematically until later) whereas Stirner places the responsibility for reproducing these conditions on the human subjects themselves and, ultimately, on the super-subject, History.⁶²⁹ This, in essence, is the central difference between Stirner’s critique of consciousness and Marx and Engels’s communism. The *raison d’être* of the former is a mytho-logy, a study and critique of myth, while the latter aims toward an examination of what Max Weber called “social facts.”

However, one of the social facts that Marx and Engels take as a given is precisely the human being as acting, producing, and procreating subject. Subjectivity, in other words, is not eschewed by Marx and Engels; rather, it is conceived primarily in terms of practice and, to be even more precise, immanent practice, i.e. practice that is always

⁶²⁸ For a recent discussion of Marx’s emerging concept of living labor as a continuation of the Hegelian concept of alienation, see Mario Sáenz, “Living Labor in Marx,” in *Radical Philosophy Review*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2007), 1-31.

⁶²⁹ In the context of a critical discussion of Sartre, István Mészáros explains that this ideological approach is predicated on profound lack of a concept of objective contradiction and cannot but pass over the only kind of agency that matters, which is collective agency: “It is this substitution of mythically inflated individual conflictuality for . . . social contradictions which produces the impenetrable opacity of the historical totality, generating thus in its turn the ‘World Spirit’ . . . so as to be able to superimpose order on the mysteries of atomistic individual interaction” (305).

taking place rather than anxiously anticipated. By contrast, Stirner envisions his subjects as striving for practice in the future. Because he does not view practice as a presently realized truth, his subjects are primarily thinking subjects – no matter how much Stirner insists on their actual corporeality. In effect, then, Stirner's individualism is based on a systematic denigration not only of what people think but also of what they do. In order for Stirner to pose the question of why people fail to overthrow their oppressors, he has to assume that, on the whole, the oppressed consent to the existing state of affairs and are at home in their alienation. This throws doubt on Stirner's entire project because, as Marx and Engels point out, the transformation of society becomes not a historical necessity but an abstract imperative. Commanding people to throw off the yoke of foreign rule is an empty injunction if it is based on the premise that they would not otherwise act in their own best interests.

Ultimately, the philosophical perspective that does not recognize revolutionary activity as a fact of reality will wait forever for change to come to pass because any real revolution will appear as more of the same; transformation, in other words, defined as that which never happens must remain a permanent impossibility. Marx and Engels recognize the circular nature of such formalism and argue that people are constantly engaged in the process of transforming their conditions of existence even though not every act of resistance is successful. History, in their eyes, is constant movement albeit the "old mole," as Marx expresses it in "The Eighteenth Brumaire," does its digging underground. Workers have not gone on strike only "here and there"; rather, they have acted "in a revolutionary way" (*CW* 5, 204) since the Byzantine Empire. Thus, when Stirner accuses the communists of positing "ideals" and "tasks," he projects his own

idealism onto what he calls “Social Liberalism.” This is the conclusion that Marx and Engels reach in their confrontation with the section of *Ego* that is specifically concerned with communism. Inasmuch as this dissertation is in keeping with the consensus that *The German Ideology* is an effort at “self-clarification”⁶³⁰, it is useful to look more closely at the particulars of the Stirnerian argument that prompted Marx and Engels to rethink their critical socialism.

The (Anti-)Moral Imagination and Objective Interests

As we have seen, Marx and Engels manage to distance themselves from Hegelian philosophy by deriving their materialist standpoint from the social position of the proletariat and by differentiating it from the idealist standpoint on the basis of the theory of the division of labor. To repeat, Marx and Engels begin with the argument that all constructions of ideal essences operate on the mistaken notion that actually existing reality is an expression of a higher, transcendent truth. They thus come to the conclusion that this notion is a philosophical predilection and that even the critics of philosophy tend to project their own experience onto non-philosophers. Charging Stirner with “putting his nonsense into the socialists’ mouths” (*CW* 5, 206), they reject his criticism that the communists create an abstract ideal “society” (*Ego*, 105), maintaining that “it would only occur to a saint of the type of our Sancho to separate the development of ‘human beings’ from the development of the ‘society’ in which they live” (*CW* 5, 215) and hence suggesting that society is only an abstraction for philosophers who believe they are detached from it.

⁶³⁰ *CW* 29 (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 264.

While it is clear that Marx and Engels accept some of Stirner's critical arguments against Bauer and Feuerbach, they maintain that he is wrong in his attack on the communists because the communists do not develop theories from a philosophical perspective; they simply fight for the interests of the working class, and one of these interests is the abolition of private property. Stirner holds that socialism wants to abolish all possessions, i.e. all personal property, and establish a single owner, society: "Before the supreme *ruler*, the sole *commander*, we had all become equal, equal persons, that is, nullities Before the supreme *proprietor* we all become equal – *ragamuffins*" (*Ego*, 106)⁶³¹ Marx and Engels respond to this claim by pointing out that the conflation of capitalist private property and personal property as well as the conflation of property and identity is a staple bourgeois objection against communism. (This is still the case today. In particular, the image of the failed socialist countries as societies of clones has served as the standard indictment brought against Marxism.) Accusing the communists of trying to get rid of all ownership, Stirner effectively universalizes a specific form of ownership; in Marx and Engels's words, he "turns the phrase of the bourgeois into the true concept" (*CW* 5, 208). His elevation of what one might call Egoist's "will to property" to the status of an absolute principle may appear to be a contradiction given Stirner's strong resentment against all absolutes⁶³², but it is in line with his vindication of the supposed identity of individuality and egoism. Thus, when he declares that the social liberals

⁶³¹ A few lines up, Stirner puts it similarly when he says that the socialists, "want to make them all 'ragamuffins [*Lumpen*]'; all of us must have nothing, that 'all may have.'" And "[n]o *one must have* . . . , so now *society* alone obtains the possessions." The socialists, according to Stirner, call on us: "Let us do away with *personal property*. Let no one have anything any longer, let everyone be a – ragamuffin. Let property be *impersonal*, let it belong to – *society*" (*Ego*, 104-5).

⁶³² Hans Helms expresses the contradiction between Stirner's critique of religion and his assumption of private property in the following manner: "Die Religionskritik seiner Epoche war endlich zu der Einsicht gelangt, daß der liebe Gott nur als Fiktion den Leuten im Kopf sitzt. . . . Daß man aber ihn um sein teures Eigentum bringen will, das empört Stirner sehr, und er setzt sich den lieben Gott als 'Einzigem' wieder in den Kopf" (*Die Ideologie der anonymen Gesellschaft*, 82)

support the “robbery of the ‘personal’ in the interest of ‘humanity’” (*Ego*, 106), Marx and Engels “challenge ‘Stirner’ to name a bourgeois who has written about communism (or Chartism) and has not put forward the same absurdity with great emphasis” (*CW* 5, 207-208). Against this naturalization of the existing order of things, they assert that “[c]ommunism will certainly carry out ‘robbery’ of what the bourgeois regards as ‘personal’” (*ibid.*, 208).

The right to secure property for myself, to the exclusion of others, however, far from being an actual reality, is a theoretical right only for the majority of people. It is a typical bourgeois argument that, if workers only worked hard enough, they can achieve upward social mobility. It is the classic meritocracy myth. Viewed from this angle, it becomes clear that Stirner’s ideas were steeped in a “blame-the-victim” approach that attributes responsibility for society’s ills to those who bear them. Marx and Engels comment: “And . . . who is the person that should bear the ‘blame’? Is it, perhaps, the proletarian child who comes into the world tainted with scrofula, who is reared with the help of opium and is sent into the factory when seven years old – or is it, perhaps, the individual worker who is here expected to ‘revolt’ by himself against the world market—or is it, perhaps, the girl who must either starve or become a prostitute?” (*CW* 5, 212). The upshot of this logic is that “I, the actual man, do not have to change actuality, which I can only change together with others, but have to change myself in myself” (*ibid.*). Fredric Jameson has called this ideology the “Cartesian maxim,” according to which I must ““always to seek to conquer myself rather than fortune, to change my desires rather

than the established order, and generally to believe that nothing except our thoughts is wholly under our control.”⁶³³

The notion of the importance of internal change, the transformation within the individual, not objective social change, is dear to Stirner. However, he projects this notion onto the communists, claiming that they want to expunge the “natural” egoism from the individual psyche and behavior in the pursuit of a “sacred society” (*Ego*, 111). Marx and Engels turn this charge around to say that it is not the communists but Stirner who follows a “faith” (*ibid.*, 110) – faith in the all powerful will of the competitive, narcissistic, and cynical subject of bourgeois liberalism. The concept of egoism, for Marx and Engels, is simply a legitimization of the power of the propertied to exploit the working poor, who are not weak because they lack the unscrupulous egoism of the strong but because their circumstances force them to engage in a life-and-death struggle. Their true “egoistic” interest is the emancipation from this struggle by way of removing the coercive circumstances. Thus, they assert that “[i]n revolutionary activity the changing of oneself coincides with the changing of circumstances” (*CW* 5, 214). Distinguishing between intellectual utopianism and practical struggle, they maintain “[t]hat communism is a highly practical movement, pursuing practical aims by practical means” (*ibid.*, 215). In other words, Marx and Engels discard the question of who or what is to be held accountable for the preservation of oppressive power relations and ask instead how people resist against and transform these structures. By contrast, Stirner’s position that coercion can be abolished by the individual and by way of an attitude change implicitly

⁶³³ Fredric Jameson, “The Ideology of the Text,” in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*, Vol. 1: Situations of Theory, Theory and History of Literature 48 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 70. Jameson’s critique is here directed toward Deleuze and Guattari.

and explicitly places all responsibility for the reproduction of the *status quo* on each person and her frame of mind.

Stirner advances two more arguments that betray his bourgeois inclinations: one, he claims that it should be everyone's prerogative to labor or not, and two) he maintains that privilege is a kind of happy coincidence. When aimed at the communists, these arguments take the form of the accusation that the critique of private property is based on "a hatred of the 'unfortunate' against the 'fortunate'" (*Ego*, 109-10) and on a totalitarian impulse to subject all of society to a regime of toil and drudgery. These ideas are deeply invested in a conservative apologia of bourgeois life: leisure, defined as the exemption from all productive activity, is portrayed as the epitome of freedom. (In opposition to this, Marx argued in *Capital* that both the worker and the capitalist are alienated but that the former's situation is superior because he is from the beginning in a state of rebellion against it whereas the latter is content in his alienation.) Productive activity is conceived as alienating *in toto* (because labor cannot be imagined as existing anywhere else but in class society), and therefore, "laziness" is the negative ideal to be achieved. The communist, according to Stirner, denies people this freedom: "If you were a 'lazybones,' he [the communist] would not indeed fail to recognize the man in you, but would endeavour to cleanse him as a 'lazy man' from laziness and to convert you to the *faith* that labor is man's 'destiny and calling'" (*Ego*, 110). Moreover, the bourgeois life of leisure, which Stirner himself was not able to enjoy, is conceived not as the systemic condition of exploitation and *vice versa* but as an accidental stroke of luck. Again, Stirner argues that the communists want to rid the world of the "fortuity of circumstances" (*Ego*, 108) and put an end to "*fluctuations*" (*ibid.*, 109) which he argues are natural and hence

cannot be eradicated. Words like “fortuity” and “fluctuations,” however, hide the laws governing the capitalist mode of production which routinely converts ““free activity, which is for the communist the creative manifestation of life arising from the free development of all abilities of the ‘whole fellow’ (in order to make it comprehensible to ‘Stirner’), into ‘dull labor’” (*CW* 5, 225).

Marx and Engels distinguish between the utopian and socialist philosophical tradition on the one hand, implicitly validating Stirner’s criticisms of its various representatives, and the communist movement on the other hand. In their discussion of Stirner’s objections, they begin to distance themselves from particular leaders. For example, they accuse Stirner of using the “non-communist” Proudhon (*CW* 5, 216) as his main source on communism.⁶³⁴ One source of disagreement with these thinkers was the issue of violence as means for revolutionary transformation. Marx and Engels did not oppose the use of violence on ethical principles; they viewed it as a historical fact, as a necessary condition of radical transformation. This does not mean that massive bloodshed is inevitable, only that force is required for a fundamental change in power relations to occur. Stirner, for different reasons, was not opposed to violence per se; he wanted the individual to assert his “right” to resist with all his “might,” and if need be with violent means, against the oppression inflicted by a violent regime. From this standpoint, he criticizes communism, charging that it is not revolutionary at all because it seeks a peaceful solution. Marx and Engels counter this charge arguing that Saint-Simon and Fourier were not representatives of the French communist movement (*ibid.*, 226). Again, this distinction between theoretical and practical communism is partially a problem of

⁶³⁴ In an unfinished note, Marx and Engels add that “the communists have accepted nothing [from Proudhon] but his criticism of property” (216, note *).

class and the difference between the revolutionary movement and the “communist *bourgeois*” (ibid.), a “rare occurrence” (ibid.) and potentially an idealist liability. The upshot of the Marxian argument here is that Stirner’s claim that socialism is just another form of myth-making does not apply to the revolutionary proletariat. What’s more, they contend, Stirner’s criticism applies to himself at least as much as to the utopian thinkers he attacks. In other words, Marx and Engels concede that idealist socialisms are romantic, detached from reality, and abstract; however, they also seek to demonstrate that Stirner, rather than explain historical transformation in terms of actual people and actual practice, offers merely another idealist system: an egoism that is romantic, detached from reality, and abstract.

At the same time, Marx and Engels are clear about the fact that, in contrast for example to Proudhon’s anarchist stance, Stirner’s egoism is essentially bourgeois in nature, and the problem of private property serves them to illustrate this argument. Far from acknowledging that “Property is theft,” Stirner advances against communism “the oldest and most trivial of bourgeois objections” (*CW* 5, 228), namely that private property is the basis of individuality. In the context of discussing the third form of liberalism, what he calls “humane liberalism,” Stirner pursues this idea in some detail. He asserts that “interestedness” is essential to being human (*Ego*, 113) and claims that individuality is defined by an interest in a personal will, personal property, and a personal opinion. According to Stirner, the liberals try to take away all of those things and are hence aiming to build a society where “nothing which bears the character of ‘private’ is to have any value . . . [and] everything special or private will be left out of account” (ibid., 115). He says further that the socialists, by “taking away *property*” (*Eigentum*)

want to take away “*self-ownership* [*Eigenheit*].” He concludes that “every *opinion* must be abolished or made impersonal” (ibid., 115-116).

Interestingly enough, it is specifically the second of these constructions, the identification of property with individuality, which prompts Marx and Engels to cite none other than Destutt de Tracy. Quoting from Tracy’s *Traité de la volonté*, Marx and Engels maintain that what is supposed to be a persuasive line of reasoning is nothing but a simple play on words: one that links *propriété* and *propre* in Tracy’s case and *Mein* and *Meinung* and *Eigentum* and *Eigenheit* in Stirner’s case. However, this ostensible feat of logic is not an innocuous example of how etymological connections can be exploited (*CW* 5, 229); it is an elaborate defense of private (i.e. bourgeois) property that rests on the identification of “the actual private property that the communists want to abolish . . . [with] the abstract notion of ‘property’” (ibid.). Marx and Engels put it like this:

When the narrow-minded bourgeois says to the communists: by abolishing property, i.e., my existence as a capitalist, as a landed proprietor, as a factory-owner, and your existence as workers, you abolish my individuality and your own; by making it impossible for me to exploit you, the workers, to rake in my profit, interest or rent, you make it impossible for me to exist as an individual.— When, therefore, the bourgeois tells the communists: by abolishing my existence *as a bourgeois*, you abolish my existence *as an individual*; when thus he identifies himself as a bourgeois with himself as an individual, one must, at least, recognise his frankness and shamelessness. For the bourgeois it is actually the case, he believes himself to be an individual only insofar as he is a bourgeois.

But when the theoreticians of the bourgeoisie come forward and give a logical justification for this equation, then this nonsense begins to become solemn and holy. (Ibid.)

The connection between capital on the one hand and the specific institution of private property, as opposed to personal property in general, is already staked out by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*: A tattered frock-coat, say, is personal property that may have value for me, “[b]ut no economist would think of classing it as

my private property, since it does not enable me to command any, even the smallest, amount of other people's labor" (ibid., 230). It is not until the advent of private property *qua* capital that the accumulation of wealth becomes an end in itself and the complete denuding of the laborers (through the stripping of the mass of workers of their means of production and hence the loss of ownership over the specific commodities produced) the ultimate condition thereof. However, alienation means that the chronically propertyless are confronted by alien forces in the form of what Marx was to call later "dead labor" and forced, in order to maintain their physical existence, to spend themselves in the form of "living labor" producing surplus for the propertied. As soon as it is objectified, this surplus further subjects the labor of the workers to the commands of the machine that is capital. Thus, far from enabling the full development of individual talents and desires, private property (i.e. "rent of land, profit, etc., these actual forms of existence of private property") stands opposed to individuality for the majority of people (and are the "*social relations* corresponding to a definite stage of production"). The bourgeois is in "the same slavish relationship to capital," his individuality reduced to the "poor content" of being a mere personification of capital; he is motivated by one aim only: profit (Marx's words in *Capital*⁶³⁵). By contrast, the worker, while also restricted in the pursuit of her aims, has a "rich" identity because she also works toward a new social order. This, I would suggest is the meaning of Marx and Engels's words when they say, "According to Destutt de Tracy, the majority of people, the proletarians, must have lost all individuality long ago, although nowadays it looks as if it was precisely among them that individuality is most developed" (*CW* 5, 231).

⁶³⁵ This is from the unpublished chapter of Volume 1 of *Capital*, "Results of the Immediate Process of Production." See Karl Marx and David McLellan (ed.), *Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 384.

In their critique of Stirner, Marx and Engels come to the conclusion that the Young Hegelian critique of religion, with Stirner as its final result, was a battle against windmills. By setting himself against the world, the philosopher is trapped in an impossible relationship with reality. Having condemned himself to the lonely life of reason amidst a benighted humanity, as the only voice of sanity in an insane universe, he has to close his eyes to the true forces of history and make himself ridiculous as he struggles against the fantasies of his fellow philosophers. In the process of struggling against Feuerbach's fantasies of Man, Stirner blows Feuerbach's abstract conceptions out of all proportion, foisting "'Man' on history as the sole *dramatis persona*" (*CW* 5, 234), perpetuating these same abstract conceptions without realizing that neither Man, nor God, "nor his predicates have ever been the main thing for people . . . [that] this itself is only a religious illusion of German theory" (*CW* 5, 235). Hence, Stirner remains forever at the level of the critique of religion, which, as Marx and Engels put it, is a "bone" that is "gnawed away to the last fibres." Cooking a "thin Rumsford beggar's broth" (*ibid.*) from this bone, Stirner substitutes "the struggle against religious illusions, against God, was again substituted for the real struggle" (*ibid.*).

At the same time, Marx and Engels seem to maintain that the critique of abstraction from an abstract viewpoint must be understood as the condition of the scientific study of reality. They argue that Feuerbach's contribution to the materialist method was to recognize "the religious world as the illusion of the earthly world" (*CW* 5, 236). The question of how this is possible "paved the way to the materialistic view of the world, a view which is *not without premises*, but which empirically observes the actual material premises as such and for that reason is, for the first time, *actually* a critical view

of the world” (ibid.). They cite Hess to argue further that it is precisely the consideration and systematic explanation of an other, of a reality outside of philosophy, that enabled the study of the “empirical, material attitude” of people in their actual circumstances, which is not possible with the “theoretical equipment inherited from Hegel” (ibid.). This shift from solipsism to science is what Marx and Engels have in mind when they say that “One has to ‘leave philosophy aside’ . . ., one has to leap out of it and devote oneself like an ordinary man to the study of actuality, for which there exists also an enormous amount of literary material, unknown, of course, to the philosophers. . . . Philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as onanism and sexual love” (ibid., 235-236).

It is precisely the fact that Stirner does not recognize Feuerbach as pointing in the right direction that he is guilty, in Marx and Engels’s eyes, of missing the point. Perhaps one way to put this is to say that Stirner takes Feuerbach too seriously and, by doing so, ends up merely reproducing his mistakes. That is, Feuerbach had aimed to displace the (alienated) belief in a an other reality beyond mundane reality and effectively attributed to this belief and his own critique a power it did not have. Stirner generalized Feuerbach’s fixation on religion, seeing religious beliefs everywhere. Stirner ultimately accepts the notion of the historical omnipotence of religious ideas and effectively attributes to them a subjective status. In Marx and Engels’s words,

[H]e actually believes in the domination of the abstract ideas of ideology in the modern world; he believes that in his struggle against “predicates,” against concepts, he is no longer attacking an illusion, but the real forces that rule the world. Hence his manner of turning everything upside-down, hence the immense credulity with which he takes at their face value all the sanctimonious illusions, all the hypocritical asseverations of the bourgeoisie. (*CW* 5, 237)

It could be argued that this interpretation is not altogether fair and that Stirner did in fact try to go beyond Feuerbach by developing a more concrete understanding of the material substratum of human society. The concept expounded by Stirner in opposition to Feuerbach is that of the “inhuman” egoist who is both the fundamental basis of all sociality (“Only when you are single can you have intercourse with each other as what you are” [*The Ego*, 121]) as well as the irreducible end of all criticism (The critic “cannot criticize away the private person himself, since the hardness of the individual person resists his criticism” [ibid.]). Stirner sees his theory of the “un-man” (*Unmensch*) or anti-man (*Ego*, 124) as the logical conclusion of the secularization of philosophy. His claim that “[t]he sentence ‘God has become man’ is now followed by another sentence: ‘man has become I’” (124) is coupled with the injunction that we must resist the communist idea that people are “the *equal children* of our mother, the state” [107]⁶³⁶) and become non-moral egoists. However, the “I” in Stirner does not merely refer to the egoist in general but to this egoist in particular: Stirner thinks of himself as bringing philosophy to an end by way of finishing the process of repossessing the Spirit.

Realizing that their own earlier philosophical stance was based largely on this self-aggrandized notion of the thinker as savior, Marx and Engels turn decisively against Stirner’s arrogance in their effort to show that his solution to the Young Hegelian dilemma was no advance over Feuerbach. Marx and Engels argue that the atomic individual is just as elusive and illusive as the universal human. Further, Stirner’s “materialist” proposal that history strives toward the overcoming of all abstract thought to achieve a state of “thoughtlessness” is merely the negation of the philosophical instance

⁶³⁶ Marx and Engels respond to the simplistic either/or logic that contrasts egoism with altruism by saying that “Saint Sancho knows only egoism on the one hand or the claim to the loving services, pity and alms of people on the other hand. Outside and above this dilemma nothing exists for him at all” (*CW* 5, 211).

by way of a philosophical phrase. The positive quality that Stirner wants to affirm is far removed – both theoretically and practically – from the reality as it is experienced by actual human beings. Again, Marx and Engels argue that there is a connection between his petty bourgeois outlook and the impotence of his anti-idealism: “[H]e becomes not a proletarian, but an impecunious, bankrupt bourgeois. He does not become a man of the world, but a bankrupt philosopher without thoughts” (*CW* 5, 236). Preaching abstention from abstraction, Stirner is not only a hypocrite but a hypocritical elitist too, for he believes that he – not the people who are struggling every day to push beyond the existing order – is in possession of the key to a new historical moment.

This is also where the difference between Marx and Engels on the one hand and Stirner and Bauer on the other becomes most apparent. The sheer number of times that Marx and Engels elaborate on the theme of the philosopher’s distance from the concerns and practices of the working masses shows that it was a crucial insight for them. Specifically, Stirner’s “I” and its “corporeity” (*Ego*, 124), which he says constitute the “deadly enemy,” the “invincible opposite,” the “devil” of liberalism (*ibid.*, 125), have no bearing on the actually existing masses, whom Stirner accuses of “not pleading guilty of egoism,” of “repudiating” it and “fighting against it” (*ibid.*, 126). This is the point at which Stirner agrees wholeheartedly with Bauer and at which the difference between Marx’s understanding of the revolution and that of the Young Hegelians becomes clear: the latter view all historical transformations merely as false starts or preparatory steps preceding the true revolution, which is projected into the future. Marx, on the other hand, grasps revolution as a principle underlying all of history, including the past and the present, and thus sees it as an empirical reality, not as an ideal to be achieved. For Marx,

the revolution is accomplished by historical individuals who stand to gain from a revolutionizing of the relations of production. For Bauer and Stirner, on the other hand, the revolution is something otherworldly in the sense that it is absolutely distinct from the here and now and from what has come before.

Marx and Engels pull the rug out from under Stirner's ideas when they declare him to be a mere symptom of capitalism. Stirner wants to "dissolve" everything "fixed" (*Ego*, 127), and he wants to make atheism universal (*ibid.*, 128), but he does not realize that both of those supposedly imminent events have already come to pass, have already become historical facts. He wants to do what criticism did not manage to do—that is, to overcome "dogmatism" in favor of "things" – but he does not realize, as Marx and Engels put it, that a "'corporeal ego,' carnally procreated by man and woman, . . . needs no construction in order to exist" (*CW* 5, 240). Stirner's professed martyrdom, then, appears superfluous because it is too late; history happened without him. Further, the ethos according to which a person determines his or her own life by way of attitude or character was spawned by the bourgeois imagination and continues to serve as a form of collective repression in today's so-called late capitalist economies. Barbara Ehrenreich puts it well in her book *Bait and Switch* in her discussion of "The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream). The idea that personality accounts for success or lack thereof is clearly still based on the notion "that circumstances count for nothing compared to the power of the individual will"⁶³⁷. After all, "It's not the world that needs changing, is the message, it's *you*. No need, then, to band together to work for a saner economy . . ., or to band together at all. . . . [W]e are our own enemies."⁶³⁸ Today, ideologists "coach" the unemployed and

⁶³⁷ 81.

⁶³⁸ 85.

precariously (or anxiously) employed “look inward, not outward; the world is entirely what you will it to be.”⁶³⁹ One might add that this concept is not only a “long-standing American idea” but an idea at least as old as capitalism itself. Stirner, it turns out is not a special kind of prophet or even a “criminal” who “defends his skin” in the “kingdom of thought” (*CW*, 133-134) but an apologist of class inequality.

Many of the themes discussed in Part I of *The Ego* are belabored once again in Part II as Stirner sets up the figure of the unique ego as the ultimate fulfillment of history. In fact, the poetic celebration of the unique is reproduced in so many different ways in the second part of Stirner’s *Ego* that Marx and Engels’s sarcastic comment “*Repetitio est mater studiorum*” (*CW*, 186) cannot but strike a cord with even the most well-intentioned reader. While *The German Ideology* is often accused of repeating itself *ad nauseam*, Marx and Engels can at least be credited for persevering in their purpose to review a book of considerable recursiveness. The fact that Marx and Engels continue to comment on each modification in Stirner’s ideas demonstrates that they perceived a need to consider each objection to communism and each repudiation, no matter how conventional, or perhaps precisely because of their conventionality. After all, Stirner’s anarchist alternative to modern society was only one particular refraction of the bourgeois imagination and as such held critical clues about the worldview generated by the new mode of production. However, it is important to remember that *The German Ideology* was not a critique of capitalism per se but a much more general critique of class.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 221. Ehrenreich is speaking of the transition industry whose very existence depends on victim-blaming and the “prohibition on anger” (ibid., 220). The idea is that those who fail consistently to sell their labor power are responsible for their own situation and must bring about an attitude change in order to re-enter the work force. In this context, she poignantly remarks that “Different as they seem on the surface, the atheistic philosophy of individual will and . . . [Christian ideology] both offer the fantasy of omnipotence. And if you can achieve anything through your own mental efforts—just by praying or concentrating hard enough—there is no need to confront the social and economic forces shaping your life” (ibid., 221).

Further, Marx and Engels wrestle with “the old” in the form of Hegelian philosophy, arguing (more implicitly than explicitly) that Stirner’s inability to see communism as revolutionary was closely connected to his Hegelian commitments. Thus, they insist over and over that, despite Stirner’s avid proclamations to have overcome Hegel, his individualism is reminiscent of Hegelian philosophy in many ways. For one, the concept of the unity of creator and creation in the ego is a kind of miniature version of Hegel’s world spirit. Beyond the level of particular ideas, the overall organization of *The Ego* resembles Hegel’s system. If the dual structure of *Ego* undercuts Hegel’s dialectical method, the second part of the book recuperates the familiar tripartite divisions. “Ownness”—the essence of the human individual—is surpassed by “the owner”—the individual in the process of becoming, of realizing his essence—who is in turn surpassed by the “unique one”—the completion and final embodiment of the process of becoming. The second or central term of this progressive development also consists of three aspects that succeed each other apparently dialectically: “My power,” the revealed and transcended truth of political liberalism; “My intercourse,” the revealed and transcended truth of social liberalism; and “My self-enjoyment,” the revealed and transcended truth of human liberalism.

The arguments in *The Ego* pick up themes from Classical philosophy. As I have demonstrated at various points in this chapter, much of Stirner’s philosophical and historical framework exhibits a continuation of certain Idealist motifs. This is true also for the more straightforwardly political points. For example, Stirner’s construction of “ownness,” translated in the *Collected Works* as “peculiarity,” is premised on the critique of the conventional definition of freedom as something entirely negative. As Kant and

Hegel did before him, Stirner proposes a positive concept of freedom⁶⁴⁰: “Of what use is a freedom to you . . . if it brings in nothing? And, if you became free from everything, you would no longer have anything; for freedom is empty of substance . . . I have no objection to freedom, but I wish more than freedom for you: you should not merely *be rid* of what you do not want; you should not only be a ‘freeman,’ you should be an ‘owner [*Eigner*],’ too” (*Ego*, 141-2). Maintaining that freedom has hitherto been conceived as “riddance” only and led to “self-denial,” Stirner proposes that we replace the empty (Christian) ideal of freedom with the reality of ownness, which he defines as “property” (*ibid.*), which brings Stirner within the realm of political economy.

To illustrate his theories, Stirner offers the example that while one is not free in slavery (and, since the material constraints of existence always imply a certain amount of slavery, one is never free in the sense that one is rid of all external forces and restrictions), one is still always oneself or, in Stirner’s words, “one’s own.” Even more absurdly, he goes on to say that while one’s leg may not be free from a cruel master’s stick, one’s leg always remains one’s own leg (*ibid.*, 143). As far as Marx and Engels are concerned, this is a rather dubious kind of satisfaction. Wary that his argument could be confused with the Christian idea that people can be bound in chains and still be “inwardly free” (*ibid.*, 144), Stirner insists on the difference between the two, suggesting that beneath our ideal chains lies a fundamental corporeal selfhood, which is inherently positive and permanent. This is an ontological claim that Marx and Engels see no reason to dispute.⁶⁴¹ What they do dispute, however, is that this basic mode of being (identity qua simple survival) guarantees freedom if brought to consciousness. Existence thus

⁶⁴⁰ See Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959 (1958)).

⁶⁴¹ It is worth recalling here Alfred Schmidt’s well-known defense of Marx’s materialism as non-ontological and hence non-philosophical. See *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (trans. by Ben Fowkes [London: NLB, 1971]).

abstracted and idealized has nothing at all to do with either freedom *from* the “fetters of reality” (*Ego*, 143) or freedom *to* have “power” and “control” (ibid.).

Stirner is quite convinced that an original, “antecedent egoism,” which ensures inward *and* outward freedom (*Ego*, 143) must be recovered. He portends the moment when all hope of otherworldly redemption is forsaken; to bring this moment about, he implores his reader: “Therefore turn to yourselves rather than to your gods or idols. Bring out from yourselves what is in you, bring it to the light, bring yourselves to revelation!” (ibid., 146). Give up “the habit of the religious way of thinking [that] has biased our mind so grievously that we are – terrified at *ourselves* in our nakedness and naturalness” (ibid., 147)! Marx and Engels point out that this *a priori* notion of the individual with his inalienable subjectivity is “rather the same as . . . Hegel’s absolute idea at the end of the *Logik* and of absolute personality at the end of the *Encyclopaedie*” (*CW* 5, 241). And this notion in turn is only one of several solutions to the social developments that had their origin the sixteenth century. Descartes, Hobbes, and Defoe presented other versions of this story, the historical determinations of which were, of course, the conditions of capitalism, as Marx himself explained in his *Grundrisse*: “The individual . . . with whom Smith and Ricardo begin, belongs to the unimaginative conceits of the eighteenth-century Robinsonades . . . It is, rather [than a reactionary naturalism] the anticipation of ‘civil society’ . . . In this society of free competition, the individual appears detached from the natural bonds . . . [and] appears as an ideal, whose existence they project into the past”⁶⁴² and the future, one might add, as is the case with Stirner.

If the recovery process is conceived as the negation of the negation, Stirner gestures on in the Hegelian *modus operandi* when he maintains that idealism will be

⁶⁴² *Grundrisse*, Penguin, 83.

sublimated by its higher truth, by its realization, by “reality.” According to Stirner, idealism strove to free the individual from everything that is not “I,” but egoism is the fulfillment of this “longing” by giving birth to the primordial freedom that precedes all actual struggles for freedom. The idea is that the beginning already contains the end and that the end is merely the beginning in its true form. Truth, in this scheme, is that which arises from and, after a necessary movement, returns to itself. Hegel called this truth “Spirit,” and Stirner called it the “Ego.” Thus, he says that the “*own man*” (as opposed to merely the “free man”) “is *originally free*, because he recognizes nothing but himself; he does not need to free himself first, because at the start he rejects everything outside himself, because he prizes nothing more than himself, rates nothing higher, because, in short, he starts from himself and ‘comes to himself’” (ibid.). This kind of recognition, however, is only possible after a process based on misrecognition is completed, just as Hegel posited that successive stages of misrepresentation were necessary before full Self-consciousness could be achieved.

Marx and Engels also continued to follow some of Hegel’s philosophical principles, but they were able to push against their idealist aspects. Their conception of post-capitalist communism as a mode of production based on communal property, for example, which could be construed as a sort of return (to “primitive communism”) at a higher level (marking the end of prehistory and the beginning of history), shares certain features with Hegel’s “circle of time”⁶⁴³; however, their notion of time was a truly historical one in the sense that it is filled with intractability and contingency; there is no simple escape or final guarantee, just social forces, economic laws, political opportunities, brutal violence, and hard-won victories. Stirner challenges Hegel by

⁶⁴³ Robert Stern, *G.W.F. Hegel: Critical Assessments* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 392.

arguing that power resides not only in some specially chosen agents but the most ordinary person (such as “a Nero, a Chinese emperor, or a poor writer”); however, he retains the notion that “might” is a transcendent quality, a secret that requires a unique kind of key. For Marx and Engels, there is nothing magical or mysterious about power; it is merely the objective product of economic conditions, and just like the material conditions from which it springs, power itself is not a thing but a relation, and that relation is social in nature. Thus, Marx and Engels take no issue with Stirner’s recourse to the notion that “one goes further with a handful of might than with a bagful of right” (*Ego*, 151), but they conceive the struggle for power as one irrevocably tied to social structures and processes.

On the other hand, one might reasonably hold that Marx and Engels do not comment on Stirner’s claim that “there is a difference between self-liberation and emancipation” (*Ego*, 151) because they disagree on a more fundamental level. In their view, the two forms of freedom condition each other. Referring to the censorship laws in the German States at the time, Stirner draws a distinction between “being set free” and “taking freedom,” indicating that nominal freedom is not real freedom (“What use is it to sheep that no one abridges their freedom of speech? They stick to bleating” [ibid.151]). What he has in mind is the kind of apathy despite the official recognition of individual autonomy that cultural critics have observed and explained since Adorno. As I have pointed out before, this is simply not a problem that Marx and Engels were concerned about at the time they were writing. But Stirner suggests further that an emancipated slave remains a slave if the emancipation was “granted” rather than “procured,” an idea that reveals a rather simplistic understanding of social struggle. Marxian theory

stipulates, against this, that no freedom is ever granted unless it is procured by those who have an interest in it, but the struggle is often more complex than a straightforward rising up and taking hold of power. Even more importantly, struggle is not a matter of breaking the prison-house of language.⁶⁴⁴ In his elaborate semantic excursions, Stirner implies that words and their meanings confine our practices and limit the realm of possibility with respect to what can be imagined and what can be done. In one passage, for example, he suggests that terms like *Eigennutz* (selfishness) have bad connotations because Christian culture elevated “selflessness” to an absolute ideal. The idea, however, that an individual who redefines the meaning of a word and “behaves as if” can bring about her emancipation, much less self-liberation, is illusory for Marx and Engels (*Ego*, 153). Subjective liberation coincides with objective emancipation which depends on objective change (rather than interpretation). The third Thesis on Feuerbach demonstrates that Marx and Engels were working through this problem in their critique of Stirner. Thus, Marx says: “The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*” (*CW* 5, 4).

Marx and Engels also criticize one of Stirner’s renditions of the idealist phenomenon-essence distinction. Stirner is concerned to separate true and untrue egoism or the “egoist in agreement with himself” and the “egoist in the ordinary sense.” This is, of course, because Stirner has to grapple with two basic facts: 1) the fact that individuals do pursue their own individual interests and exhibit behavior that is conventionally called “egoistic,” and 2) the fact that altruistic or unselfish actions are as common and real as

⁶⁴⁴ Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972).

their opposite. Hence, in order to make his argument about the *absence* of selfishness and the *illusion* of selflessness among his contemporaries, he makes a double move, claiming on the one hand that what appears to be selflessness is actually nothing of the sort but rather just another form of selfishness and on the other hand that what looks like egoism is not true egoism but a degraded and false form. Stirner's case is clearly contrived and based, as Marx and Engels argue, on a dull apologist maneuver: "The trick of proving to the 'selfless' that they are egoists is an old dodge." Stirner adds the adverse trick of "transforming the bourgeois into non-egoists" (*CW* 5, 243-4). The really real and the truly true are thus whatever helps the ideologist to justify the interests of the bourgeoisie.

With respect to interest (egoism), the problem with Stirner's postulates is not only that he constructs it as a concept and opposes it to reality but that he considers this concept more real than reality itself. Predictably, only the individual subject has real interests; social interests are declared religious ideals. Marx and Engels maintain that Stirner reveals his "ignorance of real people and conditions" (*CW* 5, 244), by which they mean specifically his inability to ask, not to mention answer, the question of "How is it that personal interests always develop, against the will of individuals, into class interests, into common interests which acquire independent existence in relation to the individual persons, and in their independence assume the form of *general* interests?" (*ibid.*, 245). Marx and Engels argue further that there are no (historically important) personal interests apart from class interests; or, to put it differently, personal interests are always already class interests (*ibid.*, 247). More generally, if there is no contradiction between the personal and the general, if they are two sides of the same coin (*ibid.*, 246), it is because objectification (the transformation of the personal into a power independent of

individuals and their will) is not some kind of deformation or corruption of the human essence but rather a necessary result of human intercourse, the product of life, not the product of thought. Because Stirner does not take his critique of Hegel far enough, he cannot descend “from the realm of speculation into the realm of reality, from what people fancy to what they actually are, from what they imagine to how they act and are bound to act in definite circumstances” (ibid., 246).

Marx and Engels persistently maintain that communist theorists do not employ empty moral categories. However, their response to Stirner’s charge that communism is based on a faulty concept of human nature is more specific than that. Marx and Engels argue here that the communists employ the concept of self-interest just as their opponents do. It is worth investigating this notion here because even today, the objection is habitually advanced that Marxism is misguided because it takes altruism, rather than egoism, as its basic premise. The Marxian position that communism is not an ethical philosophy insofar as it does not distinguish between egoism and altruism because these are moral, not empirical categories:

Communism is quite incomprehensible to our saint because the communists do not oppose egoism to selflessness or selflessness to egoism, nor do they express this contradiction theoretically either in its sentimental or in its highflown ideological form; they rather demonstrate its material source, with which it disappears of itself. The communists do not preach *morality* at all, as Stirner does so extensively. They do not put to people the moral demand: love one another, do not be egoists, etc.; on the contrary, they are very well aware that egoism, just as much as selflessness, *is* in definite circumstances a necessary form of the self-assertion of individuals. Hence, the communists by no means want . . . to do away with the “private individual” for the sake of the “general,” selfless man. That is a figment of the imagination. . . . Communist theoreticians, the only communists who have time to devote to the study of history, are distinguished precisely by the fact that they alone have *discovered* that throughout history the “general interest” is created by individuals who are defined as “private persons.” (CW 5, 247)

Communist theory, as explained by Marx and Engels, is thus based on what *is*, not on what *should be*; reality is opposed to morality: The study of reality is opposed to the formulation of moral exhortations. It has been argued by critics that Marx took an easy way out of the problem of ethics by declaring simply that what looks like prescription is really description. However, what Marx and Engels actually argue here is that it is much easier to demand that reality adjust to lofty ideals than to try to understand that reality in all its unruly contradictions. They did not turn the injunction “Be altruistic!” into the statement “People are altruistic.” Rather, they reject individualistic, moralistic discourse altogether in favor of a theory of social interest.

Stirner, by contrast, deliberately takes the stance of the teacher. He lectures his readers on the imperative of becoming conscious of their true nature. Just as Hegel thought of himself as the first embodiment of the self-consciousness of history (the philosophical realization of the final reconciliation of thought and being), so Stirner seems to perceive himself as first sign of the ultimate union of human nature and the reflective awareness of that nature. By claiming that human beings are essentially egoists but that they are not real egoists as long as they do not recognize themselves as egoists, Stirner “exploits the old philosophical device . . . [that tells people:] You have always been people, but you were not *conscious* of what you were, and for that very reason you were not in reality True people. Therefore your appearance was not appropriate to your essence. You were people and you were not people” (*CW* 5, 250). Once again, the demand that people should change their consciousness is revealed by Marx and Engels to be inherently idealist. Furthermore, Stirner falls prey to philosophical ideology when he

asserts in the manner of Hegel's phenomenology⁶⁴⁵ that existing reality is not really real but only a signpost on the road to Reality. If Stirner argues that ordinary (false) egoism must be transformed into true egoism ("egoism in agreement with itself") by the eradication of self-denial, Marx and Engels maintain that ordinary, mundane egoism is simply people "realising real egoistical interests" (ibid., 252). What Stirner calls "self-denial" is merely an ideological concept that functions either to reconcile the oppressed to their situation or to blame them for not changing it.

Despite the constant reminders that criticism must deal with material life, Stirner hangs all his theories on *consciousness* – to the point where, as I have already discussed, the figments of the imagination are portrayed as quasi-material. Stirner suggests that spiritual entities are like vampires feeding on our flesh. Stirner does not use this language, but he conjures the uncanny in his descriptions of monstrous fantasy creations. Believed to have passed on to the next world (as religion is believed to be a thing of the past), these "undead" continue to inhabit this world, roam around with a terrifying ghostly power, stalk their human prey, and suck the life-blood out of their victims. But eventually, reason prevails: In Stirner's scheme, the monstrous appearances are brought down; the "ego" reveals them as creatures of superstition, legends and folktales. However, this feat is achieved through (critical) consciousness. Note that, throughout this epic drama, protagonist and antagonist are one and the same: the cogito. This continued focus on consciousness, as enemy and savior, demonstrates that Stirner's materialism is only skin-deep. It is unclear, however, whether the idealism inherent in this particular philosophy of possessive individualism is the product of naïveté or manipulation. While he

⁶⁴⁵ Marx and Engels draw this parallel by titling this section "2. The Phenomenology of Egoism in Agreement with Himself, or the Theory of Justification" (*CW* 5, 242).

says that he wants to let spirit die a second, a final, death, he brings it back once more, but he does so clandestinely. Marx and Engels try to grasp the two personalities of the “unique” when they refer to Stirner sometimes as credulous and sometimes as crafty, sometimes as Don Quixote and sometimes as magician.

Stirner views any and all restrictions on the individual as the result of a restricted mind. However, Marx and Engels point out that desires and ideas are “fixed” because their underlying social conditions are “fixed.” Thus, they explain, “If the worldly conditions prevent him [Stirner] from satisfying his stomach, then his stomach becomes a master over him, the desire to eat becomes a fixed desire, and the thought of eating becomes a fixed idea” (*CW* 5, 255). A society, they suggest, which prevents certain classes from satisfying basic needs, can only be, and will be, overthrown through revolution. They then clarify their position by asserting that, while certain forms of fixation must be eradicated, not all material fixations are alienating; in fact, they claim that a certain degree of specificity (of talents, of expressions, of activities, of tastes) is necessary. This is where Marx and Engels move away from humanist notions of totality. More specifically, they maintain that “since they [the communists] attack the material basis on which the hitherto inevitable fixedness of desires and ideas depended, the communists are the only people through whose historical activity the liquefaction of the fixed desires and ideas is in fact brought about” (*CW* 5, 255, note *). At the same time, however, “[t]he communists have no intention of abolishing the fixedness of their desires and needs . . . ; they only strive to achieve an organisation of production and intercourse which will make possible the normal satisfaction of all needs, i.e. a satisfaction which is limited only by the needs themselves” (256, note * contd.). Communism, then, attempts

to establish a society that satisfies everyone's basic needs, such as the need for shelter and food, and allows people to develop new needs, social and individual needs, the fulfillment of which is made possible for all.

Stirner is faced with an aporia: Against Hegel and the entire philosophical tradition, he rejects the metaphysical impulse to see transcendent essences in everything, and yet he needs the postulate of the primacy of consciousness in order to explain both the present absence of freedom and the future possibility of liberation. It is clear, to cite Mészáros one more time, that “no separate individual, nor some more or less haphazard aggregate of ‘sovereign’ individuals, could conceivably represent a violable alternative to an established social order.”⁶⁴⁶ In contrast to the theories of possessive individualism, theories based on class interests necessarily imply an alternative *social* order. For Stirner, however, individual *consciousness* – not social practice – is the key to the end of alienation. This stands in conflict with Stirner's materialism and specifically his notion that the only locus of authentic sovereignty is the hedonistic body, “self-enjoyment.” In other words, Stirner wants to have his cake and eat it too. Having just invested the body with self-sufficiency and the ability to create everything (the ego), Stirner turns around to define the true ego, the “owner of the owner,” as one imbued with consciousness. Thus, Marx and Engels remark, “Hence, when his spirit wishes to acquire independence in relation to him, Saint Max calls his flesh to his aid, and when his flesh becomes rebellious, he remembers that he is also spirit. What the Christian does in one direction, Saint Max does in both. . . . [He] adopts the attitude of the reflecting ego to himself as the real ego . . . He is the ‘creator’ only insofar as he possesses *consciousness*” (*CW* 5, 257). Thus, Marx and Engels argue that Stirner has given in to the “‘temptation’ to turn [in a

⁶⁴⁶ István Mészáros, *Beyond Capital: Toward a Theory of Transition*, 309.

circle] on the [heel] of speculation” (ibid., 259),⁶⁴⁷ thereby revealing himself to be another one of those “reflecting individuals, who imagine that in and through reflection they have risen above everything, because in actual fact they never went beyond reflection” (ibid., 258).

No matter how much Stirner tries to insist on his “flesh,” he always attributes supreme significance to the transcendent power of the mind and disavowing the fixity of social structures and interests. Stirner believes that the restrictions that individuals experience in their lives have to do with their inability to stretch their consciousness. In truth, Marx and Engels argue, however, “The fixation of interests through division of labour and class relations is far more obvious than the fixation of ‘desires’ and ‘thoughts’” (ibid., 259). Stirner engages in a prolonged lament that people do not cultivate all possible qualities of their personality but rather only a very few qualities. But rather than inquire into the empirical reasons for the organization of life and labor in the present, Stirner blames the amputation of the individual’s range of talents on his failure to become a true egoist. He implies that the individual has a choice over whether or not to develop the totality of his faculties and that the one-dimensional exercise of one’s skills must be due to a lack of mental maturity. Thus, he sees not definite abilities, as expressed in definite practical activities, but only “the fantastic idea of ability” (ibid., 269). He himself even maintains to be beyond this alienation in a world where everyone else obediently accepts the strictures that impose severe limits on the range of one’s expressions. Marx and Engels claim, on the other hand, that Stirner is particularly affected by the alienating circumstances of the division between mental and manual labor because he not aware of it.

⁶⁴⁷ See also ibid, 261.

Because of his intellectualist “local narrow-mindedness” (*CW* 5, 264), then, Stirner’s solution to alienation systematically avoids all references to economic reality. Thus, Marx and Engels charge, “All his qualities are present in him and whence they come is all the same to him. He, therefore . . . does not need to worry about the conditions in the world, which in reality determine the extent to which an individual can develop. . . .” Correcting Stirner, Marx and Engels explain that,

It [the fact of alienation] depends not on *consciousness*, but on *being*; not on thought, but on life; it depends on the individual’s empirical development and manifestation of life, which in turn depends on the conditions obtaining in the world. If the circumstances in which the individual lives allow him only the [one]-sided development of one quality at the expense of all the rest, [if] they give him the material and time to develop only that one quality, then this individual achieves only a one-sided, crippled development. Nor moral preaching avails here. (*CW* 5, 262).

To Stirner, whom Marx and Engels call a “parochial Berlin school-master” the real contradictions in social reality are an unpleasant reminder that his own “relations to this world are reduced to a minimum” (*ibid.*, 264). Marx and Engels maintain that “it is indeed inevitable that his thought becomes just as abstract as he himself and his life, and that thought confronts him . . . in the form of a fixed power, whose activity offers the individual the possibility of a momentary escape from his ‘bad world,’ of a momentary pleasure.” The fact, in other words, that Stirner closes his eyes to the social realities is a product of the alienated conditions under which he works: “[T]he school-master’s [thinking reflects on and speculates about] this empirical [fact in a school]-masterly fashion” (*ibid.*).

It is clear that Marx and Engels do not consider Stirner’s constructions as an improvement upon, or even much different from, Hegel’s idealist philosophy. Marx and Engels cite the idea of the self as creator (or presupposing ego) and creation (or

presupposed ego) and relate it to the Hegelian concept of the self-supposition of essence are. By comparing statements from Hegel's *Logic* with passages from Stirner's *Ego*, Marx and Engels demonstrate that rather than having left the notion of essence behind, Stirner's "true egoist in his creative activity is . . . only a paraphrase of speculative reflection or pure essence" (*CW* 5, 266). Thus, they confirm that the individualism of the ego is not a viable means of developing the radical moments of Hegel's legacy. If anything, it is a retreat to a more conservative subjectivism that disregards objective facts outright.

Beyond the Will to Power – Toward Historical Change

Before returning to the problem of Young Hegelian idealism, Marx and Engels insert a brief commentary on what they mockingly refer to as "our 'unique' author's" "special virtuosity of thought" (*CW* 5, 272), by which they are referring primarily to Stirner's stylistic and rhetorical choices. Marx and Engels's verdict is that *The Ego* is not only a badly conceived but also a badly written piece of work. While, throughout *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels point out instances of wrongly used formal devices and grammatical errors, their charge that *The Ego* is an exemplar of poor prose comes to a head in this section titled "3. The Revelation of John the Divine, or 'The Logic of the New Wisdom.'" They criticize Stirner's use of pronouns, specifically the "mysterious it" which is missing a clear referent (*CW* 5, 122). They reprimand him for simple errors such as the mix-up of verb tenses (*ibid.*, 168). They comment on his use of the "trashy distinction" (*ibid.*, 273), the "pompous tautology" (*ibid.*, 291), and the paraphrase that makes a relation appear as a "manifestation, as a mode of existence of another" (*ibid.*,

298). Finally, they maintain that Stirner's work achieves the "*mode composé* and *bicomposé* of absurdity" (ibid., 222) not only in terms of its content but also in terms of mechanics. And, even more sardonically, they remark, "His self-delight stands in inverse proportion to the delight experienced by the reader" (ibid., 279).

They take particular issue with Stirner's use of appositions. A "logical trick," the apposition serves Stirner, according to Marx and Engels, to relate unrelated things together: "In order to transform one idea into another, or to prove the identity of two quite different things, a few intermediate links are sought which partly by their meaning, partly by their etymology and partly by their mere sound can be used to establish an apparent connection between the two basic ideas. These links are then appended to the first idea in the form of an apposition" (*CW* 5, 275). An example for the misuse of this function is Stirner's observation that the communists aim to overcome their "state of distress," to change the existing "state of affairs," to do away with "estates" and "status," and to abolish the "state" (ibid., 212) as if communism was a philosophy of language. Far more incriminating is Stirner's equation of philosophical speculation and commercial speculation and his association of *Geld* (money), *Geltung* (worth, value), *Vermögen* (wealth or capability), and *vermögen* (to be able), which serves to reinforce the bourgeois reduction of everything to property and the cash-nexus. While the terms may be related etymologically, Stirner relates them normatively, claiming that the concept of private property *should* be viewed as the only meaning of any words and phrases that are historically connected with it.

The problem of style pertains directly to the problem that is mental labor. Marx and Engels indicate that philosophy is a language game, which takes place at a great

remove from the “language of real life.” This philosophical language is accused of being so out of touch with common sense that it is effectively without meaningful content. Thus, they give a summary description of the flaws of Stirner’s writing as a way of cataloguing this purely formalistic emptiness. According to Marx and Engels, *The Ego* is characterized by “carelessness of thought – confusion – incoherence-admitted clumsiness – endless repetitions – constant contradiction with himself – unequalled comparisons – attempts to intimidate the reader – . . . crude abuse of the conjunctions . . . – ignorance – clumsy assertions – solemn frivolity . . . -- in short, sheer manufacture of a thin beggar’s broth (491 pages of it) in the Rumsford manner” (*CW* 5, 272).

Critical theory, they seem to say, has forfeited every claim to call itself “critical” when it declares the work of negation finished by presenting an imaginary solution to imaginary problems. For example, Marx and Engels view as “trashy” Stirner’s demonstration that the abstract concept of “the people,” which he believes is false, can be demolished by asserting the truth of the “ego” simply by willy-nilly equating statements with another. First, Stirner says that the “ego” is not “the people”; from this statement, he deduces that “the people” are equivalent to the non-existing ego or “non-ego”; finally, he arrives at the conclusion that the “ego” is the dissolution of “the people.” While this may be a fine demonstration of philosophical logic, Marx and Engels object that “the negation, the “not,” is, according to convenience, regarded as an expression of dissimilarity, difference, antithesis or direct dissolution” (*ibid.*, 279). All the while, we might add, the falsity of “the people” (“the nation,” “humanity,” etc.) is revealed through class practice, and the reality of individual self-realization is brought about through

revolutionary action. Stirner, however, envisions that what is a gritty material process is actually a clean mental operation.

Marx and Engels argue that the reason why Stirner shows as little concern about actual developments as he does about meaningful (“scientific”) argumentation is because he has little regard for the “definite thing” that is reality. Thus folding the critique of syntax, style, and form back into the critique of the idealist manner of approach, they say, “Saint Sancho avoids this rock by presenting everything definite as merely an ‘*example*’ of the holy” (CW, 283). Stirner reduces the world to examples of the holy, even labor.⁶⁴⁸ Most grievously, Stirner mistakes real conflicts for ideal ones. As a result, he imagines that the conflicts will cease to exist if we simply cease to believe in them: “Thus he manages to transform the real collision, the prototype of its ideal copy, into the consequence of this ideological pretence. Thus he arrives at the result that it is not a question of the practical abolition of the practical collision, but only of *renouncing the idea of this collision*” (ibid., 287-8). In this way, absurdly, real revolutionary activity is “divorced from all its empirical conditions of life, its activity, the conditions of its existence, if it is separated from the world that forms its basis and from its own body” (CW 5, 289).

One way this is accomplished by Stirner is through the out-of-hand rejection of the concept of a “vocation” or “task.” Marx and Engels partially agree with Stirner that attributing a particular calling or mission to a person or, worse yet, social groups, reeks of transcendence, but they also insist that “[i]n the real world . . . individuals have needs . . . [and] thereby already have a *vocation* and *task*” (ibid.). Stirner may believe that by

⁶⁴⁸ Referring to Stirner’s claim that labor is just another instance of the holy, they comment: “He could have continued: another example is the state, another is the family, another is rent of land” (283). And further down, they add: “He has in fact reduced everything to its exhaustive, classic expression, by saying of it that it is ‘another example of the holy’” (CW, 284).

declaring something our “task,” we are subordinating ourselves to it, making ourselves slaves to it, but he turns things upside down by “seizing on the word vocation, that is, on the mental expression of their [the individuals’] actual conditions of life, and leaving out of account these conditions of life themselves” (ibid.). The proletarian, for example, is “confronted with the real task of revolutionising his conditions. He can, of course, . . . [say] that to do this or that is the human vocation of the proletarian,” but regardless of what consciousness says, there is still a basic “reality underlying this idea . . . [a] practical aim” (ibid.).

What Marx and Engels are saying, in essence, is that the idea of a vocation (*Berufung*) is derived from actual vocations (*Berufe*) that are the product of the division of labor. That is, whatever shape this idea might take, it is always primarily a practical consciousness of the real limitations of the division of labor. They express this argument as follows: “If, for example, the workers assert in their communist propaganda that the vocation, designation, task of every person is to achieve all-round development of all his abilities, including, for example, the ability to think,” it is because the individual “has been crippled by the division of labour at the expense of his abilities and relegated to a one-sided vocation.” Only the abolition of the real limits of the restrictions of vocations (or work that consists of only a limited number of tasks) will abolish the abstract ideas of a vocation (or calling): “What is here asserted in the form of a vocation, a designation, is precisely the negation of the vocation that has hitherto resulted in practice from the division of labour, i.e., the only actually existing vocation – hence, the negation of vocation altogether” (*CW* 5, 292). If the revolutionary work proceeds under the banner of having a vocation, this does not outstrip the practical transformation achieved: “The all-

round realization of the individual will only cease to be conceived as an ideal, a vocation, etc., when the impact of the world which stimulates the real development of the abilities of the individual is under the control of the individuals themselves, as the communists desire” (ibid.).

In this context, Marx and Engels return to the problem of the particular and the universal. Here too, their argument is two-fold; on the one hand, representing particular individual interests (class interests) as universal interests can be simply imaginary or strategic, and on the other hand, they maintain that reality makes the particular universal. The conditions in which the individual finds herself are the conditions of her class, and the need to overcome these conditions is not particular to the individual but to the class. Beyond that, the overthrow of the ruling class is in the interest of all other classes. Therefore, it is not surprising that “the task of the individual members of a class striving for domination should be described as a universal human task.” Marx and Engels remark that this notion of a “task” is the language of real interests: Incidentally, when for example the bourgeois tells the proletarian that his, the proletarian’s, human task is to work fourteen hours a day, the proletarian is quite justified in replying in the same language that on the contrary his task is to overthrow the entire bourgeois system (*CW* 5, 290). Hence, they establish that while the *idea* of the particular and the *idea* of the universal are both rooted and mediated in concrete circumstances.

Similarly, the idea of (self-)determination is always first and foremost a material one. While the communists work to effectively to overcome the forces that determine their lives, Stirner imagines that self-determination can be achieved through consciousness alone, “that it depends on your will whether you think, live, etc” (*CW* 5,

291). Moreover, since self-determination is for Stirner an attitude of skepticism toward any objective conditions and interests, he defines self-determination as “the *reservation mentalis* of indifference to any kind of determinateness” (*CW* 5, 291). Simply believing oneself undetermined by external circumstances, however, does not make the individual self-determined. What Marx and Engels seem to suggest here is that the practical destruction of *Fremdbestimmung* (foreign determination), which can only be achieved through the taking of an active “interest” in determinateness, is the first form of *Eigenbestimmung* (own determination). We might take this further to say that conditions that determine a class can only be abolished through a practical act of collective self-determination. Revolutionary action, then, marks the emergence of individual self-determination.

Stirner, however, maintains that he can “destroy them [determining circumstances] without having to touch them” (*CW* 5, 292). Specifically, he claims that he can destroy real property relations without actually touching any real property. Stirner wants to offer a theory of ownership that avoids the common reference to material things when he says, “[M]y property is not a thing” (*Ego*, 245). This amounts to the ideal postulate that property is not about class relations but about individuals’ minds. The *thought* of not having to respect anyone’s “right” to property or of being able to “control” everybody else’s property is what counts for Stirner as real property: Hypothetical property is as good as actual property. Similarly, the Romantics proclaimed that property is actually a sign of poverty and real wealth is the spiritual kind.⁶⁴⁹ However, Marx and Engels point out further that such a notion would predictably be popular with a certain social class, namely one that does not enjoy bourgeois private property but wishes it did:

⁶⁴⁹ See, for example, Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden*, Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com, 2005.

“Saint Sancho has said simply and frankly that everything that is the object of his imagination . . . is his idea, i.e., his possession . . . [T]he fact that he passes off this conjectural property as property in general was bound, of course to have a magical attraction for the propertyless German ideologists” (*CW* 5, 295).

The subjectivism inherent in this concept of property is apparent. Stirner declares every object a property of the subject as long as the subject “recognizes” the object as his. The Hegelian form of Stirner’s argument (such as the postulate that an object “for” the ego is also an object “of” the ego) provokes Marx and Engels’s remark about the “the great dialectician” (*CW*, 302) that Stirner’s argument is merely a rhetorical trick: “Since everything that is object for the “ego” is . . . also his object and, therefore, his property . . . [,] he is able to proclaim himself the owner of every object that exists for him. By this means he can proclaim that the world surrounding him is his property, and that he is its owner – no matter how much it maltreats him and debases him” (*ibid.*, 296). Further, Stirner claims that property relations can be reversed simply by way of changing one’s consciousness: namely by reversing the emphasis from “my *object*” to “*my* object.” Rather than *think* of property as alien, we must *think* of it as our own. Everything depends on whether stress is laid on the word ‘*my*’ or on the word ‘*object*’” (*ibid.*). That is, “[t]he methods of appropriation and canonisation are merely two different ‘refractions’ of one “transformation” (*ibid.*). This transformation from canonization to appropriation is to be achieved by way of the subject turning inward. Thus, Stirner phrases his ideas as injunctions: “Wherever difficulties, arise, Sancho hacks his way through them by means of a categorical imperative such as ‘turn yourself to account,’ ‘recognise yourself,’ ‘let each become an all-powerful ego,’ etc.” (*ibid.*, 292).

Revolution, then, and despite Stirner's own critique of the Christian-style "pure movement of the *inwardness*" (*Ego*, 300), is entirely a matter of self-reflexivity, a personal journey into one's "thought-world" (*ibid.*), a process of interiorization. Revolution, thus conceived, is based on the rejection of the facticity of an external reality, a denunciation of material conditions, and a deliberately induced blindness toward that which is outside of the individual. All this is captured in Stirner's concept of "rebellion" (rather than "revolution"), which Marx and Engels view as "the specific expression of the impotent dissatisfaction of the philistine" (*CW* 5, 300). In Stirner, rebellion does not "take the form of an *action*, as it is only the 'sin' against 'the holy' . . . [R]ebellion is transformed into an imaginary act" (*ibid.*). Because imaginary change does not translate into real change, Marx and Engels call Stirner "the greatest conservative" and conclude, "Since his whole activity is limited to trying a few hackneyed, casuistic tricks on the world of thoughts handed down to him by philosophical tradition, it is a matter of course that the real world does not exist for him at all and, therefore, too, remains in existence as before" (*ibid.*, 300-1).

Stirner himself views rebellion as the only true form of change and revolutions in history as perpetual repetition of the same: the abdication of actual freedom through submission to doctrines and ideals and new authorities. Marx and Engels claim about Stirner's materialism that it does not recognize historical struggles as practical responses with practical solutions to practical needs: "Saint Max transforms a definite historical act of self-liberation into the abstract category of 'freedom'" (*CW* 5, 302). And "'Man has been substituted for actual individuals, and striving for a fantastic ideal – for freedom as such, for the 'freedom of Man' – has been substituted for the satisfaction of actual needs"

(ibid., 303). According to Marx and Engels, real change and acts of resistance are historical reality; slaves have resisted and overthrown their masters on numerous occasions in the past. The “wretched of the earth” do not need philosophers to preach to them about their power; the slave – as was the case with the slave rebellion in Haiti – simply will revolt when he “takes the decision to free himself” (ibid., 309). Incidentally, Stirner’s insistence (discussed above) that real freedom is self-liberation is not what he thinks it is—a materialist redefinition of the problem of freedom—but rather another facet of the idea of self-determination so dear to all ideologists (ibid., 311).

Stirner’s anti-dialectical reading of history has certain postmodern aspects, specifically with respect to the concept of power. Not altogether unlike Foucault, Stirner views the master-slave relationship as not marked by a clear vector of power. Stirner argues that the slave will not be fully subordinated to his master as long as he has his own “advantage” ‘in mind.’ Parts of his body may be subordinated at any given moment, but in his essence he remains his own master. Predictably, Marx and Engels disagree with this assessment and resent Stirner’s suggestion that a tortured person can be “in control”: “Thus, when he lies trussed up in the spanso bocko tortutture of Surinam, unable to move hand or foot, or any other of his limbs, and has to put up with everything done to him, in such circumstances his power and peculiarity do not consist in his being able to make use of his limbs, but in the fact that they are his limbs” (*CW* 5, 308). It seems that what Stirner posits here is that the very possibility of resistance makes the slave his own master. He claims that while the slave is not “free from” the master’s blows, not even in his mind, the slave dominates the situation by using the beating for his own benefit. This is supposed to be the case because the slave merely deceives the master, appearing to

accept his blows, in order to strike back at the first opportunity. Knowing that he could reverse the relationship at any moment, the slave endures her oppression happily. Power, in other words, is not objective but subjective. Marx and Engels, on the other hand, maintain that the power of the master is real and can only be interrupted or broken by real expressions of defiance. Defiance is all the slave has in his very real subordination, and only concrete actions can free the slave from this subordination. Acts of resistance are not a matter of consciousness but a matter of being and doing; they are not a state of awareness but rather a concrete part of people's mode of existence.

The analysis of Stirner's book ends by way of a generalization that puts Stirner's theories once more in the context of German philosophy and the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. Marx and Engels argue once more that the philosophical phrases about "peculiarity" are means by which "the German petty bourgeois consoles himself for his own impotence." Marx and Engels charge that Stirner reduces the bourgeois struggle against feudalism to a struggle over "principles," which he believes are abstract and opposed to concrete "peculiarity," and that, in this respect, Stirner is like "the reactionaries, especially the Historical School and the Romanticists who . . . reduce true freedom to peculiarity." In reality, the concept of "peculiarity" is only an imaginary "compensation for all sufferings" produced by the impotent petty-bourgeois thinker (*CW* 5, 314-5). Stirner is thus viewed by Marx and Engels as representative of a lack of power. The theory of ideology is evidently tied to the concept of a class, which is stuck in between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, a class that is characterized first and foremost by a lack of ability to shape the course of history. Hence, Marx and Engels's theory of ideology *qua* mental labor set them apart from the other Young Hegelians, who had held

fast to the idea that critical philosophy had the unique ability to restore power in the hands of the individual, conceived not as a productive social creature but as unique personality.

If, therefore, it seems on the surface that Stirner's argument and Marx and Engels's arguments are not so different, *The German Ideology* articulates critical differences. Stirner as well as Marx and Engels claim that asking for charity will not bring about change. They claim that a case for a new morality is fundamentally an impotent gesture. However, while Stirner says that the poor are prevented by their Christian values to revolt (which is the reverse of saying that the wealthy are allowed to exploit because they are suspending the imperative that one must take care of one's fellow being), Marx and Engels claim that values have little to do with exploitation and its abolition. Interestingly, Stirner argues that egoism is not a bad thing and that everyone should assert, rather than renounce, his or her egoism. Marx and Engels argue that self-interest, rather than the moral notion of egoism, is a fact. In other words, Stirner and Marx and Engels agree that positive action, rather than critical negation, is the force that makes change. The difference between them is that Stirner believed he was bringing this good news to people while Marx and Engels maintained that people do not need to be told to fight for their interests because they already do.

Based on a close study of the most sustained discussion contained in *The German Ideology*, "III. Saint Max," my investigation in this chapter was devoted to the question of the meaning of Marx and Engels's exhaustive settling of accounts with Max Stirner. I have established the connection between ideology critique and the theory of the division between mental and manual labor. As the final chapter of this dissertation, my discussion

has shown that two projects came together in *The German Ideology*: the Young Hegelian attempt to secularize philosophy and the distinctly Marxian approach to a materialist science of society. More importantly, I have demonstrated that, in the struggle over the form and content of the dialectics of history, Marx and Engels produced a powerful rejection of the critique of consciousness, and in their painstaking examination of the “conjuring tricks” of “pure thought” they produced not only a thorough challenge of, but a fully materialistic explanation of, metaphysical thinking as a result of the ideal (pre)occupation that is mental labor.

CONCLUSION

This philosophy [anti-materialist Marxism] is defined as a radicalism of the intelligentsia rather than a doctrine of the revolutionary proletariat.⁶⁵⁰

Marx adopted such an elitist standpoint in the 1843 ‘Introduction’, treating the proletariat as a mass so wretched that, under the guidance of philosophy, they would leap in one bound from being the negation of humanity to its embodiment. The new materialist conception of history first outlined in *The German Ideology* provided a theoretical basis for its rejection.⁶⁵¹

[T]hey [the Young Hegelians and Marx] differ only in one major respect: what earlier had been described as an ideal is now described as a historical necessity and the revolutionary role of the philosopher has been replaced by a historical dialectic entirely independent of ideas.⁶⁵²

The manuscript “Saint Max” in *The German Ideology* has been dismissed as a “strange” text because it clashes in the most outrageous manner with the repertoire of critical theory. Certainly, the manuscript is longwinded and esoteric, but so are many other works. It is also clear that the book is full of vitriol and verbal abuse, but so was much of the intellectual discourse that is the work’s context. Finally, it is true that the denunciations of Stirner’s covert idealism are repetitive, but the primary purpose of Marx’s discussion is, after all, to scrutinize the materialist philosophy of *The Ego* for its metaphysical failings. Much more disconcerting than any of these qualities is the content of *The German Ideology*, which is essentially a full-scale rejection of philosophical critique. Surprisingly, the models of social criticism and radical theory which are available today are not fundamentally different from Stirner’s premise that the critic is engaged in a battle against false ideas. False ideas are now called ideologies to indicate that ideas are not necessarily right or wrong but rather serve a political purpose, usually

⁶⁵⁰ Sebastiano Timpanaro, *On Materialism*, trans. by Lawrence Garner (London: NLB, 1975), 30.

⁶⁵¹ Alex Callinicos, *Marxism and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 46.

⁶⁵² Nicholas Lobkowicz, “Karl Marx and Max Stirner,” 90.

that of sustaining the *status quo*. However, the prevailing assumption among radical thinkers, especially radical Marxist thinkers, is that revolutionary action depends on the critical debunking of the dominant ideas in the educational system, the political apparatus, the media, and the familial and religious institutions. Because *The German Ideology* breaks with this logic, it continues to baffle contemporary readers.

The source of the general lack of interest in, and even hostility towards, the text (It is dull! It rambles! It is nitpicky! It is crude!) lies in the displacement, which it effects, the displacement namely of the intellectual's most deeply held hope: that history hangs on whether or not we, the critics, can make people see reality for what it is. Of course, much has happened since the first rise of positivism. As a result, it is now impossible to forget that "Enlightenment's mythic terror springs from a horror of myth"⁶⁵³ and to disavow more specifically the return of the repressed in the material reality of capitalism: "With the spread of the bourgeois commodity economy the dark horizon of myth is illuminated by the sun of calculating reason, beneath whose icy rays the seeds of the new barbarism are germinating"⁶⁵⁴ continuously, over and over. But myth also returns in the conceptual and theoretical apparatus of a society in which the ideologist, restricted, by privilege that becomes a curse, to exclusively mental labor, imagines that the masses exist in a state of perpetual delusion. The critic still relies on the assumption of the liberating function of knowledge *qua* demystification. In light of this consensus, the question is what to do with such an anti-intellectual position as *The German Ideology* appears to be? More painfully, what is Marxist theory to do with a Marx who seems completely indifferent to the "labor of the concept"?

⁶⁵³ Dialectic of Enlightenment, 22.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 25.

Given the outrageous nature of the central ideas of “Saint Max,” it is little wonder that it been neglected by the Marxist literature. *The German Ideology* demonstrates that the perceived wisdom of the thinker is the real illusion that is the result of his alienation. While it has become commonplace that the philosophy of possessive individualism is a product of, and apology, for capitalism, Marx and Engels’s assertion that historical transformation, i.e. the exit from capitalism, is *not* contingent upon the critical deconstruction of beliefs is threatening. This is because the tradition of Western Marxism, stretching back to Lukács, Adorno, and Gramsci, has made it unambiguously clear that “tailism” is not an option. If there is one lesson we learned from the last 150 years it is ostensibly that progress does not happen automatically and that the critic must assume the responsibility to play her part in the struggle, that part being defined as the negation of the existing reality through theoretical mediation. Before the background of the rejection of mechanical models of progress, it becomes clear why *The German Ideology* is declared obsolete or extraneous to contemporary debates: because it constitutes a threat.

What this dissertation does is quite simple; it argues that once we suspend our prejudices, we will recognize the arguments against Stirner as anything but irrelevant. The question “Who is afraid of *The German Ideology*?” is to prompt the reader to interrogate and suspend her prejudice against the “extreme” positions of the text and to take absolutely seriously the second “Thesis on Feuerbach,” which says that “The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question” (CW 5, 4). What I hoped to uncover is that Marx and Engels do not suggest that thinking is of no consequence, or that bourgeois lies need not

be exposed, but rather maintain with great clarity and consistency that historical transformation is from beginning to end a matter of practice. That practice is always already praxis is self-understood. *The German Ideology* remains a powerful reminder that when legitimate political impatience joins hands with the helpless assumption that the world is crushed by ignorance, the result is a total surrender to the conditions that produce the thinker's separation from history: Removed from the actual struggles of actual people, the thinker consoles himself by imagining that the only real struggle is that between himself and everybody else. This struggle is necessarily conceived as a struggle for consciousness, that is, as a struggle to wake the sleeping. But the epic journey is futile because, if the small circle of the initiated gave up its perceived monopoly on truth, their special status (hyper-alienation conceived as freedom) would vanish. Thus, it becomes possible to see the built-in futility of the project of the critic who sees himself as the eternal solitary voice crying in the wilderness.

While the last two chapters of this dissertation aim to present the arguments in *The German Ideology* in a favorable light, I made an effort to account for real dissonances and conundrums. The contradictions in the work are not brushed under the rug but explained and problematized. The tensions in the term "theorist," for example, are not resolved by Marx and Engels and remain unresolved here.⁶⁵⁵ Further, there are many questions that *The German Ideology* does not address, such as the question of whether people are capable of systematically acting against their best interests⁶⁵⁶. There are, of course, ambiguities that arise in the reading of *The German Ideology* in concert with

⁶⁵⁵ According to the Marx of *The German Ideology*, communists can be theorists and theorists can be communists. However, it would seem that the latter are primarily philosophers and thus ideologists while the former are not.

⁶⁵⁶ The behaviorist assumption that humans behave essentially irrationally is, of course, diametrically opposed to the Marxian idea that our actions are at bottom rational. However, the actions that interest Marx most are economic ones.

Marx's other texts. One might ask, for example, why Marx did not in 1845/46 consider Stirner as a "proletarian man of letters" as he calls himself in *Capital* ("Results of the Immediate Process of Production")⁶⁵⁷ even though Stirner was also a wage worker and forced to sell his labor power.

The aim was not to set up *The German Ideology* as the ultimate model of Marxian analysis. This would be inappropriate given the highly situational nature of its particular arguments. Further, some of the text's central ideas are transitional from the standpoint of Marx's later works and must for this reason be treated as tentative. To wit, the critique of alienated (divided) labor is in the process of transformation to be replaced eventually by a critique of labor as such.⁶⁵⁸ Perhaps more importantly, *The German Ideology* does not provide much in the way of a theory of capitalism as a specific mode of production with a specific manifestation of the historical division of labor. This is certainly one area that might be usefully explored in the future. While this dissertation could not explore all of the fault-lines that run through the manuscript and its conditions of emergence, it is an attempt to examine Marx's struggle with the theoretical influences and challenges in his thinking before the focus of his work shifted decidedly towards economics.

It is fair to say that, against the backdrop of the new German philosophy, Marx's social materialism rubbed against and developed in confrontation with both the humanist currents in his own Feuerbachian period and the anti-humanist impulse generated by Stirner. Thus, this dissertation has the limited objective of adding to prevailing interpretations of Marx's critique of philosophy. This objective is accomplished through a meticulous tracing of the concept of ideology in text and context. Insofar as the central

⁶⁵⁷ Not only is a teacher at a private school "subject to capital," he or she also performs "productive labor" similarly to other workers. See Marx and McLellan (ed.), *Capital*, 389.

⁶⁵⁸ See, for example, Amy Wendling, *Karl Marx on Technology and Alienation*. New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2009.

motivation informing the close study of *The German Ideology* is to develop a clear grasp of the origin and precise meaning of the Marxian critique of intellectual labor, the framework of the dissertation as a whole is the perceived need for a new appraisal of the Marxian contribution to the critique of Enlightenment. Once this contribution is recognized, there can be an appreciation of the affinity between Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of pure reason ("The notion of the self-understanding of science conflicts with the concept of science itself"⁶⁵⁹) and Marx and Engels's critique of ideology as pure mental labor that "has no awareness of itself."⁶⁶⁰

The idea of this dissertation was to locate the origins of the critique of ideology in the critique of idealist metaphysics that defined critical philosophy during and after the Revolution. French and German philosophy at the turn of the century, with all its debt to the legacy of the Enlightenment, became the starting point of a history of expressly secularist approaches to society and social reality.⁶⁶¹ Drawing on a variety of sources (not only in the seventeenth and eighteenth century but also in the Classical period), it took on a particular force in the first half of the 19th century in Germany. In confrontation with the established religion and idealist philosophy, advocates of this movement were engaged in a difficult struggle with each other. Finally, the struggle culminated in two works, one published and the other one unpublished at the time: Max Stirner's *The Ego* and Marx and Engels's *The Germany Ideology*. The exploration of the theoretical debates that led up to Marx and Engels's critique of Stirner allowed me to revisit the confluence of factors and events that gave rise to historical materialism "as we know it."

⁶⁵⁹ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 66.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ At the same time, the Romantics were given to mysticism and religious fanaticism (as evident in the cult of Mary, transcendentalism, Catholic utopianism, the resurrection of the medieval-Catholic Reich, etc.).

What set this account apart from others is the attempt to study the history of post-Enlightenment radical philosophy with an emphasis on the origins of the ideology concept. While this, too, has been done, I am not concerned to sketch many *different* conceptions of the ideological from Napoleon Bonaparte to Marx but rather to show that there is a fundamental unity at the heart of the early notion of ideology. In this effort, I have brought together rather dissimilar thinkers, such as Destutt de Tracy and G.W.F. Hegel, but also Ludwig Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer, to show that the roots of the concept of ideology are located in a historical moment when the sensualist and rationalist schools of thought were brought in opposition to the otherworldly perspectives of theology and Romanticism and which produced a vigorously worldly, that is, atheist and *negative* (in the sense of the second term of the dialectic), stance towards existing reality. It is important to note, however, that while the Left Hegelian context is critical to this project, Marx is not reduced to it in the process. Rather, the so-called end-of-philosophy debate among the Young Hegelians serves as a means to understanding Marx's point of departure.

It has been pointed out by a number of scholars that Marx's critique of ideology was above everything a critique of idealist philosophy. I have sought to corroborate this assertion by relating *The German Ideology* directly to post-Hegelian philosophy which was also first and foremost a critique of (Hegelian) idealist metaphysics. Not much has changed since 1980 when Joe McCarney claimed that "the role of the professional ideologist gets comparatively little attention" in the literature on Marx's concept of ideology and Marxist literature in general.⁶⁶² This dissertation aims to fill this gap by systematically exploring Marx's understanding of the problem of the ideologist *qua*

⁶⁶² McCarney, *The Real World of Ideology*, 4.

professional thinker. As has been pointed out, “the use of the bare substantive ‘ideology’ on its own is quite rare [in Marx’s works], and where it does occur it has none of the hypostatized solemnity that tends to accompany it in the later literature.”⁶⁶³ *The German Ideology* is the one work by Marx that uses the term extensively, and it was my goal to show *how* Marx and Engels define, theorize, and apply the concept of ideology. On the broadest level, I hoped to show that Marx’s ideology concept is quite coherent, or at least a great deal more coherent than has been assumed. More specifically, when they speak of the ideologists, they are consistently referring to the philosophers who believe to have overcome idealist metaphysics but have remained loyal to it in spite of their claims of success.

More specifically, the central argument of this dissertation is that Marx’s concept of ideology will forever elude us unless we grasp its connection with the concept of the division between mental and manual labor. This connection is rarely, if ever, recognized in the literature. When Alfred Sohn-Rethel wrote in 1970 that “[t]here is . . . [in Marx] a lack of a theory of intellectual and manual labour, of their historical division and the conditions for their possible reunification,”⁶⁶⁴ he did not consider that *The German Ideology* is a direct confrontation with the problem of mental labor, i.e. ideology. By deconstructing and reconstructing this confrontation, I also aimed to begin to answer the vexing question of why Marx seems to have dropped the concept of ideology from his theoretical repertoire after writing *The German Ideology*. There are only a few more references to ideology in the works that follow *The German Ideology* and almost none in

⁶⁶³ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁶⁴ Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology*, Critical Social Studies (London: McMillan, 1978) 3. This little known work presents an interesting inquiry into the genetic relationship between the real abstraction inherent in commodity exchange and the theoretical abstraction of the independent intellect.

Marx's main work on political economy. This phenomenon has everything to do, I suggested, with the fact that the concept of the division between mental and manual labor also disappears from Marx's writings.

Ultimately, the significance of this dissertation is its case for a non-ideological definition of the revolutionary subject. It is important to note that, while Marx's understanding of ideology might have morphed into something more akin to the contemporary meaning⁶⁶⁵, his conception of the working class as the agent of the exit from capitalism did not change after 1845/46. The critique of philosophy in Marx's work gave way to the theory of the proletarian revolution, and the two were directly mediated through Marx and Engels's *Ideologiekritik* in their unfinished manuscript on Max Stirner, the Young Hegelians, and the True Socialists. The claim, so simple and yet so shocking 150 years later, is that the laboring masses (regardless of whether they are still called the proletariat or are more usefully conceived as the global precariat) are the vehicle of historical transformation. This idea is now typically dismissed as naïve, which is ironic in light of the fact that this is the word Marx and Engels used to describe the Young Hegelian notion that the task of revolutionary change fell first to the critic. Today, it

⁶⁶⁵ I have already pointed out the difference between the claims in *The German Ideology* about ideology and those in the 1859 "Preface." However, I also insisted that it is counterproductive to focus on apparent incongruities in Marx's ideas and hold them up as weaknesses. A prime example of this approach, which in turn does not allow us to offer any congruous explanations of Marx's intentions, is M.M. Bober's unsympathetic claim that *Karl Marx's Interpretation of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948) is incoherent and formless. He states that in *The German Ideology*,

[Marx and Engels's] theory of history is expounded with a measure of recklessness of thought and with considerable confusion of expression. The reader who consults as a unit the scattered material dealing with a given question often labors in a labyrinth of parallel, intersecting, circular, and zigzagging passages. Genesis, basis, occasion, necessary condition, cause, and determination 'in the last instance' are often used with little discrimination. Conjecture, illustration, evidence, and proof are presented at times as though they were on the same plane. The words dialectic, contradiction, inevitable, immanent, and historical necessity often appear to authenticate an argument and not because they easily fit with the context. There are not many important concepts presented with clarity and finality in one place and consistently adhered to in all subsequent discussions, and there are few important theories which do not appear in divergent and therefore puzzling versions. What plagues the reader most is the harvest of ambiguities, inconsistencies, and contradictions, sowing dragon's teeth wherever they fall. (314-5)

seems that the critics have the historical evidence on their side and are maintaining once again that the working masses are not only not necessarily revolutionary but typically passive, adapted, or even reactionary. One commentator, for example, has said a number of decades ago, that Marx did not “discover” the revolutionary proletariat, but rather he *invented* it, and that the concept “corresponds to no known historical reality.”⁶⁶⁶

Despairing before the supposed apathy of the “workers of the world” who just will not unite, the critic has once again, it seems, turned a curse into a virtue, asserting once more the importance of consciousness and the liberating function of theoretical labor.

In a way, Western Marxism (and in this respect at least its beginnings must be sought with Lenin) was essentially a series of attempts to take back the power that Marx had wrested away from the thinkers and to reinstate them as the vanguard of revolutionary social change. Ellen Meiksins Wood has summarized this trend very aptly:

It is by now a commonplace that Western Marxism has been deeply influenced by the default of revolutionary consciousness within the working class and by the resulting dissociation of intellectual practice from any political movement. This seems to have encouraged people not only to seek political programmes less reliant on the working class but also to look for theories of social transformation freed from the constraints and disappointments of history. So there has been a wide range of ahistorical theories, from the abstractions of various philosophical and cultural Marxisms to Western adaptations of Maoism . . . [,] attracted to . . . the suggestion that revolutions can be made by sheer political will, in defiance of material, historical conditions. . . . No doubt, too, the autonomy apparently accorded to ideology, politics and ‘cultural revolution’ held very particular attractions for intellectuals, situating revolution on their very own terrain. Now, with the decline of even these ahistorical revolutionary aspirations, there has remained an affinity with any theoretical tendency that stresses the autonomy of culture and, finally, *discourse*.

This suggests that the particular flavour of Western Marxism and its successors comes not just from the negative fact of their separation from working-

⁶⁶⁶ Heinz Lubasz, “Marx’s Conception of the Revolutionary Proletariat” (1969), in Bob Jessop and Russell Wheatley (eds.), *Karl Marx’s Social and Political Thought, Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*, Second Series, Vol. 4, 483-187 (New York: Routledge, 1990). An essay by Etienne Balibar, reprinted in the same publications, begins with a similar assumption but argues that Marx used the term “proletariat” only for political and polemical purposes, while he preferred the term “the working class” in his more scientific works, like *Capital*. (See *ibid.*, 488-514.)

class politics but from a tendency to fill the vacuum by putting intellectual activity in place of class struggle. There has been a kind of self-promotion of intellectuals as world-historic forces; and though this self-glorification has gone through various phrases since the 1960s, it has in all its manifestations reinforced the detachment from history. Now, discursive construction has replaced material production as the constitutive practice of social life. There may never be a revolutionary reconstruction of society, but there can always be a ruthless deconstruction of texts. We have gone a long way beyond . . . the best of Marxist historiography or by a theorist like Gramsci. Here is vanguardism with a vengeance.⁶⁶⁷

In a way too, an understanding of this development raises doubts that the failure of Marxist thinkers to investigate *The German Ideology*, whose main point is precisely the critique of this kind of theoreticist elitism, should be a coincidence. While I cannot here explore the full implications of the so-called “crisis of historical materialism,”⁶⁶⁸ I will merely suggest that the complete absorption of the ideology concept into discourse theory and the full scale dismissal of so-called “vulgar Marxism” has led to an explosion of a new kind of Young Hegelian radical philosophy that is very much like that criticized by Marx in 1845/46. Of course, the problem of whence anti-capitalist revolutionary action emerges continues to loom large, especially in the context of the current crisis (whose real effects on people tend to be obscured with the term “financial crisis”), and I cannot pretend to attempt an answer to it; however, I venture to conclude this dissertation with the proposal that we turn our attention once more not so much to proletarian ideology⁶⁶⁹ but to the ways in which those who stand in the starkest opposition to capital can and do

⁶⁶⁷ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9-10.

⁶⁶⁸ This crisis, of course, has been diagnosed long before the end of the Cold War and was famously discussed, for example, by Perry Anderson in the set of papers collected in the 1983 *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) and Stanley Aronowitz in his 1981 *The Crisis in Historical Materialism: Class, Politics and Culture in Marxist Theory* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1990). Finally, see Erik Olin Wright, Andrew Levine, and Elliot Sober, *Reconstructing Marxism: Essays on Explanation and the Theory of History* (London: Verso, 1992).

⁶⁶⁹ For a lesser known but interesting example of a classical humanist Marxist approach to Marxism as ideology, see Franz Jakubowski’s doctoral thesis, published in 1936, titled *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976).

constantly – though not everywhere, nor all the time – “work” to overthrow the capitalist regime.

I am not merely thinking here of deCerteau’s “la perruque”⁶⁷⁰ but of the recent “boss nappings” in France⁶⁷¹ and similar activities. Certainly, the question of whether or not subversive activities and labor struggles are revolutionary is another question that cannot be addressed here. But there cannot be any doubt about the fact that the separation between manual and mental labor continues to be an expression of the class structure of society (even if we must take account of new facts such as the adjunctification of academic labor): After all, most workers in so-called post-industrial society are still occupied with strenuous, monotonous, and otherwise debilitating kinds of labor, not fundamentally different from traditional “manual labor”; as Robert Kurz has noted, “It is preposterous to regard reading off monitor screens as largely intellectual labor.”⁶⁷² At the present historical juncture, it is all too easy to slip into victim blaming and hold those who suffer the most under the yoke of capital (or those who have been spewed out by capital and belong to its “reserve army”) accountable for the persistence of the conditions under which they exist. There is only a small step between anxious desire and disappointment, just as there is only a short distance between frustration and cynicism.

To avoid Stirner’s mistake and see in every revolutionary movement or act another gesture of submission or delusion, it is pivotal that intellectuals have a firm grasp

⁶⁷⁰ See Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). De Certeau shows, among other things, that the worker, instead spending her labor time productively (for the profit of the capitalist), often appropriates that time for her own pleasure. While tactics of evasion do not constitute revolutionary activities, de Certeau’s concept of “tactics” is a good means to stretch our understanding of workers’ power.

⁶⁷¹ Edward Cody, “French Workers Hold Bosses Captive to Force Negotiations: President Calls for Order, but Hostage-Taking Continues,” *Washington Post*, April 18, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/17/AR2009041703181.html>.

⁶⁷² Robert Kurz, “Die Macht der toten Dinge” (“The Rule of the Dead Objects”) *Marxistische Kritik* 3 (June 1987) 106; trans. mine.

of their own position in the social order and the *prejudices* specific to it. That is, while never giving in to inertia and a “wait and see” posture, we must continually remind ourselves, as W. A. Suchting has said, that “[i]dealism is constantly reborn . . . [and that] it finds a natural ‘culture’ in the division between mental and manual labor.”⁶⁷³ This does not mean that theory is irrelevant or that Marx and philosophy are mutually exclusionary; rather, as Suchting puts it, “[T]here is a . . . radical sense in which Marx might be argued to relate to philosophy: not by virtue of contributing to it from the inside, so to speak, as a going concern, but by virtue of his treatment of it *as* a concern, as a type of practical theoretical activity, as a distinctive type of ‘discourse’ – in particular, by doing a ‘metacritique’ of it.”⁶⁷⁴

The significance of *The German Ideology* lies in its unmitigated affirmation of the thesis that the liberation of the working class can only be brought about by the workers themselves. In other words, only the oppressed classes can and will break the chains of oppression; only the exploited masses can and will abolish exploitation; only the immediate producers can and will revolutionize the capitalist mode of production. *This* was Marx and Engel’s main argument in *The German Ideology*. It was an argument against the philosophical notion that social transformation depends on “critical thinking” and hence fully “mature,” but was primarily a radicalization of the Young Hegelian critique of religion. Because this argument is now either dismissed as naïve optimism (and this optimism written off as Marx’s pre-1848 revolutionary exuberance) or distorted into postmodern spontaneism (whose models of revolution are the hippie culture, the student movements of 1968, and the anti-globalization protests), its deepest insight has

⁶⁷³ W. A. Suchting, *Marx and Philosophy: Three Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 71.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii.

been forgotten: that the separation of the mental occupations from manual labor imposes *practical* limits on the intellectual's grasp of historical reality. Marx and Engels do not see this insight as a cause for despair but as a condition of the creation of a revolutionary science of class society.

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